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OR,

Old Polar Sol From the Northwest.

BY OLL COOMES,
AUTHOR OF "LITTLE BUCKSKIN," "BABY SAM,"
"HERCULES, THE DUMB DESTROYER,"
"WHIP KING JOE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A WINTER NIGHT AT DEER LODGE.

FAR up in Northwestern Minnesota, on the shores of a little lake that had an outlet into the Red River of the North, and surrounded by a primeval forest of majestic pines, stood a commodious log cabin. For some years it had been the home of three hunters and trappers who were widely known throughout that region by the characteristic names of Columbia Jim, Old Dismal and Wingedfoot Fred. The latter was a

WINGEDFOOT FRED, IN PURSUIT, CAUTIOUSLY SWUNG ALONG UP THE RIVER, HIS EYES AND EARS ON THE ALERT, AND HIS FAITHFUL HOUND FOLLOWING AT HIS HEELS.

boy of eighteen, noted for his remarkable swiftness of foot, and whose bursts of speed had so often excited the wonder of the Indians that they were led to bestow upon him the name by which he soon became known to friend and foe alike. Deer Lodge, as this cabin was called, was sometimes the winter's rendezvous of hunters and trappers from other points. It was the stopping-place of the fur-trader and the *voyageur* up and down the river. Its roof had sheltered many a stranger and many a friendly Indian; but whosever was the guest at Deer Lodge, he always left there with a deep sense and due appreciation of the hospitality of the place.

It is mid-winter when we would conduct the reader to Deer Lodge and introduce him to its occupants. A snow-storm is raging without. The wind is roaring through the stormy sky and the branches of the pines are moaning and creaking in the blast; but within the cabin all are warm and comfortable. A roaring fire is burning on a wide hearth, diffusing its genial light and heat into every corner of the room, and before it are seated three of the present occupants of the place—all bearded and buckskin-clad men, upon whose faces there is an eager, expectant look.

The eldest of the three was Columbia Jim, a small, sinewy man, of perhaps fifty years. He had keen gray eyes that, through force of habit, were ever on the move like the restless flashes of an eagle. His face was covered with a short, stubby beard plentifully sprinkled with gray. He had a prominent nose, a wide mouth and thin lips. Around the latter ever lurked an expression indicative of a rollicking spirit and evidence of the careless use of tobacco.

Old Dismal was next to Columbia Jim in years. He was a man of medium size, with a round full face, a small hooked nose, and big, staring eyes, all of which gave him an expression suggestive of the wise solemnity of an owl. It was his looks, and not his disposition—for he was a man of a lively, jolly spirit—that gave him his name.

The third person was a man whom we have not considered as one of the founders of Deer Lodge, although he had been sojourning there some six months, and had proven himself a skillful hunter. He had given his name as David Holland when he first came to Deer Lodge, but he had not been there a week before he had been dubbed Pilgrim Dave. He was a man of about forty years with a tall, well-proportioned form, a prepossessing face, with an open, manly countenance, a pleasant brown eye with a somewhat wearied expression. He wore a full, dark-brown beard, but his hair he kept closely cropped. To a casual observer it was plain enough that Pilgrim Dave was not a born borderman. In fact, when he came to Deer Lodge, he admitted that he had just come from civilized life eager to throw off its cares and responsibilities and follow the free and unrestrained calling of a hunter. He admitted he had no claims upon any one in the wide world, nor had any one any claims upon him, and that, being a free man, he could come and go as he pleased. The hunters were so pleased with his general appearance, and the readiness with which he adapted himself to their life, that he was finally admitted into full membership at Deer Lodge.

Wingedfoot Fred, the junior member, was not present. About an hour before night, and long before the storm began, the boy had gone out in pursuit of a deer that he had seen his hound coursing along the lake in the direction of the river. His prolonged absence caused his friends no little uneasiness. Old Dismal seemed more restless than the others, and made frequent trips to the door to listen, but each time nothing but the roar of the storm greeted his ear.

"I tell you, folks," he finally said, "this is the worst storm I've seen'd for fourteen years, and if Wingedfoot's out in the woods he'll have enough to do to find his way in."

"Fred's bump o' navigation is splendidly developed, Dismal," answered Pilgrim Dave "and I'm of the opinion he'll get in all right."

"Pilgrim," said Dismal, "I war never bewildered but once in my life, and that war on a stormy night fourteen years ago, not over one hundred miles from here, either. I'll never forget that night, though I wish I could—not because I come so nigh perishin', for I didn't come anywhere within fifty degrees o' freeze, but because o' what happened that night."

"Well, what did happen, Dismal?" questioned Pilgrim Dave.

"I don't like to even talk 'bout it, Pilgrim," the hunter went on; "in all the years Columbia Jim and me's bunked together this 's the fu'st time I've luded to that night in his presence."

"Well," said Columbia Jim, "since you have tetched on the subject, and stories o' storms adventures bein' in order, s'pose you reel it off."

"Boys, if you wait till Wingedfoot Fred gits in, I'll agree to tell the story, though, I must confess, I never did think so much o' myself after that night's work—I've aiers felt that I didn't do the square thing that time, or— Ah! Fred must be comin'! I hear his hound at the door!"

A loud scratching was heard at the door and rising Old Dismal advanced and threw the door open. As he did so a deerhound, his coat white with snow-flakes, bounded into the room in evident excitement, carrying something in his jaws. His young master was nowhere within hearing.

"What's that Bugle's got in his mouth?" asked Columbia Jim, advancing and bending over the dog; "by the burnin' martyrs!"—he continued, starting up, "it's a knife! a buckhorn handle!"

"It's Wingedfoot's!" cried Old Dismal, "and, my God! the blade's incrusted with fresh blood! Men, the boy's in trouble, if not dead!"

CHAPTER II.

OLD DISMAL'S STORY.

THE three hunters were startled and perplexed by the bloody message that Bugle, the hound, had brought in. Columbia Jim took the blade closer to the light and examined it. It was Wingedfoot's knife, that was certain, and it was stained with fresh blood, but whether the life-blood of the boy they knew not. At length Dismal said in a grave tone:

"Men, we must go and look for the lad. Maybe the dog will lead us back to his master, be he livin' or dead."

Without further words they put on their fur-caps and coats, and arming themselves with knives and revolvers, plunged out into the night and storm, Bugle leading the way. The animal led them through the woods down to the lakelet, and there across its frozen depths to the mouth of the little creek that flowed thence to the Red River. Here the dog stopped and acted very much as though he had detected the presence of something before him, then he shot away down the creek, leaving the hunters standing speechless with surprise at his strange conduct.

Suddenly, however, their ears were greeted by the sound of a voice. It came from the direction the dog had gone, and could not be far away. Old Dismal called out:

"Ho, there! who comes this way?"

Almost instantly the answer came back:

"It's me, Dismal, and a stranger."

It was the voice of Wingedfoot. The three hunters gave a shout of joy that was whisked away on the wings of the storm through the woods.

Two figures approached them, and, as they did so, Columbia Jim asked:

"Wingedfoot, what's the matter? What did you mean by sendin' ole Bugle to the cabin with your bloody knife to frighten us outen our lives? Are you hurt, boy?"

"I thought I was killed," answered Fred; "but I was worse scart than hurt."

"What happened you, anyway?"

"Why, you remember I went out to help Bugle take in a deer?" Fred explained. "Well, while they were coursing around through the woods, I thought I'd gain a position where I could head the buck off. I'd scarcely done so when the buck came snorting through the woods, and came mortal nigh heading me off. I was standing in his path, and before he could see me or I could get out of his way, we collided. A thousandth part of a second before he struck me, I drove my knife to the guards in his neck. That was the last thing I knew for as much as an hour, I reckon. When I came to it was dark and stormin'. Bugle stood by lickin' my hands and face, and doin' all he could for me. The buck was layin' across my feet, dead, and if it hadn't been for this, I reckon I'd never found out where I was. I'd been knocked senseless and breathless; and I was certain both my legs were broken, and made up my mind I'd die there unless I had help. I bethought me of my knife. I leaned over and found it stickin' in the buck's neck. I drew it out, and puttin' it in Bugle's mouth, told him to go home with it, thinkin' you folks would come on seeing it. The dog went off as if he didn't like to leave me, and I was afraid he would drop the knife, even if he should go back to the cabin. But, noble old pup, he's proven true to his training. But soon after he'd left I heard footsteps near, and, in answer to my call, this stranger came and pulled the buck off me, and then I found my legs weren't broken, but only numb. However, I soon got up a circulation and we struck out—

slowly at first, but I kept gainin' on it till I guess I'm all right again, 'cept a broken rib or two and a busted brisket. But, folks, this stranger-man is Mr. William Wyncoop, a fur-buyer from St. Loo."

"Mr. Wyncoop," said Columbia Jim, "I'm glad you happened along when ye did, and we'll make it extremely pleasant for you in our cabin. Come along, and let's git out o' this pesky old storm."

So saying, all started off and in a short time they were out of the storm, under the roof and within the cheerful warmth of Deer Lodge.

William Wyncoop at once removed his cap and great-coat and took a seat near the fire, while Wingedfoot, assisted by Old Dismal, looked after his injuries. Wyncoop was a man of five-and-forty years of age. He was a large, stoutly built man with a bearded face, steel-gray eyes, and a large flat nose traced diagonally by an ugly, red scar. He was well dressed and, although his personal appearance was not the most commendable, his speech and gentlemanly deportment made up for it. He was quite communicative, and informed the hunters that his home was in St. Louis, that he was a fur-trader, and was making the rounds of the camps of all the hunters and trappers along the Red River and adjacent territory with a view of purchasing their peltries. Having lost his horse about fifty miles from there, and being unable to replace it, he had been compelled to travel on foot.

The Deer Lodge hunters informed him that they still had in stock their fall and winter's catch of beaver, otter, mink, wolf, deer and a few panther and bear skins—in all, perhaps three thousand dollars' worth, and that they were ready to sell at any time. The trader told them that in the morning he would look at their stock which was carefully stored away in one of the three rooms of the cabin.

In the mean time Old Dismal had overhauled Wingedfoot for repairs, but aside from a few bruises he found no injuries. This discovery worked like magic upon the youth, who thought several of his ribs were broken for in a little while he forgot his misery and was the liveliest of the party.

As before stated, he was eighteen years of age, rather tall and, although slender, he was as well formed and supple in his movements as a young panther. Every feature of his manly face, his dark, hazel eyes, his nose, his mouth, his ample brow—all were expressive of a noble character, a gentle heart, an indomitable will and resolute courage—possessions that made him a devoted friend and most lovable companion. And his remarkable endurance and wonderful swiftness of foot, his cunning in setting a trap, and his skill as a rifleman, made him a most successful hunter and trapper.

A supper of roasted venison, broiled fish taken that day from the lake, bread and hot coffee was prepared by Columbia Jim for their guest, and after he had partaken of the repast, the party seated themselves before the fire when all, except Wingedfoot, brought out their pipes and tobacco for a general smoke. Columbia Jim reminded Old Dismal that a story was still due from him and that the time had now come for its telling.

"I'd hoped," said Dismal, "that you'd forgot all 'bout that, but see'n' you're bound to have me tell it, I'll go in and be done with it. Now, as I said before, it war fourteen years ago this winter in Jinewary the thing occurred. I was on my way across the country from Sauk Rapids to Buzzard Bend, to take a hand with the fur company that I heard had located there. The distance was a long one, but I felt as nimble then as Wingedfoot Fred. The ground was covered with a deep snow, but its crust would bear up a hoss. The weather was fine when I started, and continued so till I was within fifty miles o' my destination, when a storm set in just like this one. I wanted to make Goose Lake before stoppin' for the night, but the storm got so bad and the night so dark, that I act'ly got lost in the woods. But, finally, I struck a little, frozen stream with high bluffs on one side and there I made up my mind to stop for the night, live or die. I found a spot in under the bank clear of snow, and there I lighted a fire, some drift brush and old, dead roots I found there servin' as fuel. I war well screened from the storm, and I soon become so cheerful that I out with my pipe and fell to smokin'. But all to once I heard a faint cry. At fu'st I thought it war that o' a painter, but I listened till it was repeated ag'in and ag'in, and then I made up my mind it war a human cry—that, too, of a child. Lord! but didn't I scatter out o' thar quick, though? Guided by the feeble

cries, I finally came to the object o' my search, and what do you think it was?"

"A child, I s'pose," guessed Columbia Jim.

"Yes, sir, a child—a little girl, a—"

"A girl?" exclaimed Pilgrim Dave, with a start, while William Wyncoop manifested even greater surprise.

"A little girl," Dismal went on, "about three or four years of age—a sweet little blue-eyed angel, that war almost dead with cold—"

"And you say that was about fourteen years ago?" again interrupted Pilgrim Dave.

"Fourteen years ago, Pilgrim, this Jinewary," Dismal repeated. "I carried the child to camp, warmed her back to life, wrapped my own blanket around her frail little figure, and soon she seemed quite comfortable. I tried then to converse with her, but the little thing seemed too dazed—wild with terror, and every time'd break out a-cryin'. I tried every way in the world to comfort her, but she refused to be comforted. After awhile she fell asleep. I took her in my arms and sat down, and as I gazed into her sweet, baby-face, I was as near heaven as it is possible for a sinner to be. Finally, I fell to thinkin' as to how the child had come there in the night and storm. I made up my mind some man with his family must be livin' somewheres about, and, while meditatin' over the joyful surprise that would attend the child's parents when I should return it to them safe, my fire went nightily out. I laid the child down, carefully covered her up, and then started out to hunt more fuel. The fire must be kept goin'."

Here the old hunter paused, leaned forward and picking up a live coal from the hearth, dropped it into the bowl of his pipe, and began puffing away lively, in the mean time running his big eyes over his audience, who were all attention.

"As I said," the old hunter resumed, "I sailed out to hunt up some fuel to keep a fire. I couldn't see my camp-fire a hundred yards away, so thick was the timber and dense the fallin' snow. I gathered one arm-load o' wood, and then went back for another. I was about a hundred yards or so from camp when I thought I heard another cry—just in what direction I couldn't tell. But I listened, wonderin' if I war to have the care of another child on my hands. But I didn't hear the cry any more, and so I groped about in the dark, and gatherin' up my second load o' wood, returned to camp; but God o' Israel! what was my surprise and horror to find that child gone!"

"Oh, no!" cried Pilgrim Dave.

"Yes, sir," asserted Dismal, "she was gone, and what's more, I have never found out from that day to this what became of her. If I'd returned to camp when I first heard, or thought I did, that cry, I might 'a' known, at least, whether she wandered off or was carried away by man or beast. But twenty minutes had passed before I got to the camp, and in that time snow enough had fallen to fill up all tracks. I took a torch and began a search. There was a confusion of little round holes in the snow around where I'd been trampin' all evenin', but that was all I could find. I shouted until I was hoarse. Like a madman I plunged here and there through the forest until I was completely exhausted. Sick at heart, I returned to camp, and settin' down, I read myself a hull, long lecture on the subject o' condemned idiocy. Boys, I've never entirely forgiven myself for that night o' blunderin' work. Now, that's my story, and do you wonder at my not wantin' to tell it?"

Pilgrim Dave, shading his eyes with his hand, leaned forward and scooped a red coal with his pipe; then, as he pressed it down into the bowl, he asked with evident emotion:

"Do you think, Dismal, the child went away of its own accord?"

"I never thought she wandered off by herself. The snow was too deep," answered Dismal.

"Then she was undoubtedly dragged away by a bear or panther," said Wyncoop from the depths of his environing smoke.

"I don't think so," replied Dismal.

"Did you search carefully under that bank to see that there was no holes leading to the lair of a wild beast?"

"I searched every foot of it. I believe now that she was taken from my camp by the person or persons, be they red-skin or white, that had left her in the first place to perish."

"Dismal!" exclaimed Pilgrim Dave, rising to his feet, his whole frame trembling with excitement, his voice husky with emotion, "let me tell you, sir, that child *was* kidnapped—stolen from her father!"

"How d'ye know, Pilgrim?" asked Dismal, amazed at his friend's excitement.

"I know so by the dates you give of the affair

—by the description of the little girl! Comrades," and the man's words seemed to come from the depths of an agonized soul, "that blue-eyed, flaxen-haired girl *was* my child!"

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERIOUS DEATH.

PILGRIM DAVE's friends were not only startled by his declaration but, by the change that had so suddenly come over him. They sat gazing in speechless silence at the man who, pacing to and fro across the floor a few times, finally opened the door and looked out into the stormy night taking advantage of the moment to brush the tears from his eyes. When he turned back to his friends, his face was white and wore the expression of one battling with emotions of grief besieging his very soul.

"Then you had a child stolen from you, Pilgrim?" observed Old Dismal, at length, his voice deep with sympathy.

"Yes," replied Pilgrim, "my child was stolen from her home at Bethel, a settlement some fifty miles below Sauk Rapids, fourteen years ago the twelfth of this coming January. I always believed she had been stolen, but my neighbors and friends thought she had wandered off into the woods and been destroyed by wild beasts. At the time there was no snow on the ground which, being frozen hard, left no marks. But well do I remember that four days after her disappearance there fell a very heavy snow—the same in which you were lost, Dismal—that blotted out every hope from my heart. Yes, your waif of that night, Dismal, was beyond doubt my child—my Edith. Her mother had died in Detroit a year before and, by request of my wife's sister residing at Bethel, I took the child to her. The blow drove the poor woman mad, and as it severed from me the last tie of blood I had on earth, so far as I knew, I began to rove about from Maine woods to Oregon. That is why I'm here a hunter and trapper, though I have kept my secret from you. Fourteen years! if Edith is now living she is seventeen years of age, though, God only knows, it might have been better for her had she died that stormy night. I think now that she must have been carried away by Indians that were prowling around the settlements those days begging, though none had been seen in our vicinity for a month prior to her disappearance. But, comrades, I now have a mission before me, and that is to begin a search for my child just as soon as the winter breaks up, though I have little hopes of ever finding her. She may have perished that same night you saw her, Dismal, but I must satisfy myself further by visiting every Indian camp and white settlement in the Northwest."

"And Pilgrim Dave," exclaimed Wingedfoot Fred, who had all the while maintained a respectful silence, "allow me to enlist in your cause, for I believe I can be of service to you in the search for your daughter."

"Noble-hearted Wingedfoot!" exclaimed the half-distracted man, "I could wish for no better, no braver companion than just yourself."

"Then it's a bargain!" exclaimed Fred, enthusiastically, "for I've always wanted to travel and see more of the Northwest."

"But men," observed William Wyncoop, "you must remember there are a great many hostile Indians in the Northwest—yea, even in Minnesota—within fifty miles of here."

"If you dare venture there to buy furs we might go on a friendly mission," Wingedfoot Fred blurted out; "unless you stand in with the red-skins."

This last remark was made in boyish thoughtlessness, but it was evident that it touched the trader's sensitive nature for he gave a perceptible start and, removing his pipe from between his lips, he said, in a tone deftly tinged with sarcasm:

"My business as a trader requires courtesy and fair dealing on my part, and I expect the same of those with whom I trade. If I enter a Sioux camp with the laudable purpose of buying, the Indians know it, but if I go as a spy, with no obvious business, I beget mistrust. The red-skin is a shrewd fellow if he is a heathen. However, Mr. Pilgrim Dave, I will, in my travels among the Indians, keep a sharp lookout and if I should find among them any white girl that I might mistrust of being your daughter, even a captive, I will try and communicate with you at Deer Lodge."

"I will be grateful to you, Mr. Wyncoop, for your kindness," Pilgrim Dave said. "You can be of great service to me in the way you suggested without interfering at all with your business."

After discussing this sad topic at length, the party finally made preparations to retire.

It was still storming without and ever and anon the crash of a falling limb near the cabin was heard mingled with the roar of the wind.

Pilgrim Dave was the last to seek his couch and the first to rise in the morning, although all were astir before it was fairly day.

The storm had now ceased, but flayed and ragged cloud-banks lying low along the horizon threatened a renewal at almost any hour.

After breakfast the trader expressed his intentions of continuing his journey down the river as far as Buzzard's Bend. He was invited to remain until the weather was more propitious, but he could not be prevailed upon to stay even a day longer, and at last Wingedfoot Fred said:

"I've a notion to take Moscow and the sledge and carry Mr. Wyncoop down as far as the mouth of the Manomine River, anyhow. That's not far from Buzzard Bend, and I can make the trip there and back before dark."

Moscow was a large elk belonging to the hunters. It had been well trained to the harness, and was used almost daily during the winter to a sledge.

The trader told the boy he would pay him well for whatever distance he might see fit to carry him, but Fred refusing to accept any compensation, agreed to take him to the mouth of the Manomine for the simple pleasure of a sledge-ride down the river. With this understanding, Moscow was harnessed to the sledge and in a few minutes William Wyncoop was being whisked away down the river at a lively pace, seated beside Wingedfoot Fred whose happy face beamed with the exuberance of joy. The lad took his faithful friend, Bugle, with him, the dog being given a place in the sledge at the feet of his master.

That day the hunters remained close by their fire in the cabin. Pilgrim Dave could think and talk of nothing but his lost child despite the efforts of his companions to draw his mind off the subject.

The day wore slowly on and as evening approached the sky became overcast, a cold, raw wind arose from the north, and soon another snow-storm was raging.

"The kid's goin' to have a rough time o' it, after all," Old Dismal observed as he looked out at the falling snow.

"Ay! but he'll make it, Dis, responded Columbia, "you could no more lose that boy than the way to your mouth when you've a fist-full o' juicy venison."

"But it's time he war back, isn't it?"

"Hark! button yer lip!" suddenly admonished Columbia Jim, "I guess he's come now."

They listened and heard a sound like that peculiar bark of an elk, and hurried to the door and opened it and looked out. They started with surprise and horror as they did so, for they saw their elk, Moscow, pass along by the door toward his stable drawing behind the sledge in which sat, or rather reclined, a single occupant in an unnatural position, silent and motionless.

"Soul of my body!" cried Old Dismal, "what has happened?"

For a few moments the three hunters stood as if paralyzed, gazing upon the mute occupant of the sledge. His right arm hung over the side of the vehicle the hand dragging in the snow. His face was upturned to the starry sky, his head uncovered and thrown back over the rear of the sledge-box. His hair was full of snow, and from the back and under side of his head a crimson icicle hung almost to the ground.

Columbia Jim was the first to reach the sledge. He gazed down into the face of the silent driver. He recognized it as the face of William Wyncoop, the fur-trader. There was a bullet-hole in his forehead. *He was stone dead!*

CHAPTER IV.

NAIDA, THE FUGITIVE MAIDEN.

LEAVING the three hunters of Deer Lodge wrapt in mystery over the death of their late guest, we will follow Wingedfoot Fred and his passenger down the Red River.

The speed with which they glided along the smooth surface of the frozen river made the keen air all the more cutting, but the boy and the trader being warmly clad and wrapped in robes, they experienced no unpleasantness from cold.

The wind sucking down the opening through the woods made by the river kept the ice clear of snow except along the edges, so that in order to give Moscow good footing, they were compelled to hug the shore closely.

Owing to the fact that Wyncoop kept his face closely muffled, the two conversed but little.

In this way they sped along for hours. Mile

after mile glided behind them, and finally Wingedfoot observed:

"I should think we were gittin' along pretty near to Buzzard Bend, Mr. Wyncoop."

"Eight or ten miles yet, I should say," replied the trader, gruffly.

"We'll soon reel that off," said Fred, urging on Moscow, who seemed to enjoy the exercise as much as his young master.

Two or three miles more had been traversed when they suddenly turned a sharp point of land with such speed as to upset the sledge and send driver, passenger, dog and effects sprawling out over the ice.

The elk stopped in obedience to the call of his master, who rose to his feet, gleeful with laughter over their harmless mishap. But Wyncoop did not regard it in the same spirit, and turned upon the boy with words of angry reproof.

"I beg your pardon, sir—indeed I do," said Wingedfoot, apologetically. "It was not done intentionally, I assure you, and I promise it shall not occur again."

"Young man," replied the trader, sternly, "this is the second time you have deliberately insulted me. Last night, in your own cabin, you flung an impertinent insinuation at me about standing in with the Indians."

"I did not intend an insult," answered Fred, "and am sorry I said what I did; but if it is not so, I should see no reason why you should be offended."

"If you, a boy, will attend to your own business," retorted the trader, seeming to grow more irritable, "and speak when spoken to, it will save you a broken head some time. I shall take no more of your impertinence."

"All right, sir; you don't have to," replied the boy, in a manly spirit. "I have apologized for what you have seen fit to regard as insults, but you appear to think a boy is entitled to no respect, so I will take my sledge and return to Deer Lodge, and you can hoof it on to Buzzard Bend the best you can."

The robes and Fred's rifle were still lying upon the ice, and as the youth turned and began gathering them up, Wyncoop walked to the sledge, and turning it right side up leaped into it, saying:

"Young man, I rather think I will ride, and you may do the hoofing in whatever direction you prefer."

Having thus delivered himself, he spoke to the elk and it started off at a swinging trot.

Wingedfoot Fred was now thoroughly aroused by the audacious meanness of the man, whose true character was beginning to crop out. He called aloud to the elk, which, true to its training, circled around and, despite the efforts of the trader, trotted back to its master.

Wyncoop was now in a perfect rage, and the movements he made with his right hand under the breast of his coat seemed, in connection with the look upon his face, fraught with murderous intent. But, whatever thought was in his mind, it was suddenly arrested when, in turning toward Wingedfoot, who stood a few paces in the rear of the sledge, he saw something sweep suddenly into view from around a bend in the river below.

Bugle, the hound, had also made the same discovery, and starting up with a loud growl, called his master's attention in that direction.

It did not require a second glance at the object that had so suddenly attracted the dog and trader's attention to tell the young hunter that it was a light sledge, drawn by six or eight wolfish-looking dogs, approaching at a lively speed. It contained but a single occupant who sat nestled down in a bundle of robes and furs.

At sight of Wingedfoot and the trader the occupant of the dog-sledge seemed to become greatly excited and at once called the animals to a halt, but when this was effected the outfit was not over three rods away, and Bugle sprang forward as if eager to seize the harnessed, subservient curs and shake the life out of them. But Fred ordered him back and advanced himself toward the sledge, an exclamation of surprise escaping his lips as he did so. The occupant of the sledge was a female—a young girl!

Wingedfoot was completely surprised and astonished, not only at meeting a woman there, but at the remarkable beauty of her young face and her wondrous dark eyes. She could not have been over sixteen or seventeen years of age and evidently of a *petite* figure. Her pretty face was framed in by the borders of a spotless white fur hood. Her cheeks wore the ruddy glow of health, and as she raised her big, lustrous eyes and gazed up into his face with a half-frightened, half-pleading look, the boy felt his very soul thrilled as if touched by the magic wand of enchantment.

"Great goblins!" the boy exclaimed, not a little embarrassed, "I never expected to meet a girl here. Who are you, anyhow?"

"I am Naida Quesne, and I do hope I have met friends," the maiden answered, in a sweet voice, tremulous with doubt and fear.

"I'm your friend from the word go," Fred answered, "I'm Wingedfoot Fred, from Deer Lodge."

"Are you, indeed?" the girl exclaimed, her voice and the expression of her eyes and face seeming to undergo a change of pleasant relief; "oh, sir, I had just started to Deer Lodge to claim its protection."

"From whom?" asked the boy.

"From those who would make my future life a living death."

As she answered thus a hoarse, sardonic laugh burst from Wyncoop's lips. The man had been listening to the boy and girl's conversation, and turning the elk he drove it alongside the dog-sledge, saying:

"I rather think, Miss Naida, you'll go no further."

A cry burst from Naida's lips as her eyes fell upon the face of Wyncoop, and lifting her hands toward Wingedfoot she cried, in an appealing voice:

"Oh, do not let him take me back to Buzzard Bend!"

"You know him then?" observed Fred.

"Yes, he is Canada Carl—"

"That outlaw!" cried Wingedfoot; "villain! wretch! get out of my sledge at once or I will—"

Here his words were cut short by the crack of Wyncoop's pistol fired point-blank at Fred's breast, and with a cry the boy staggered back and fell upon the ice, but in a moment he was upon his feet again apparently unharmed.

The crack of the pistol had frightened the elk and away it darted, with a snort! Canada Carl, as the girl had called Wyncoop, pulled upon the line attached to its horns, which act, instead of stopping it, brought it around to the left, obedient to its training; and just as the villain's face was turned toward him, Wingedfoot Fred raised his rifle and fired, and the outlaw fell back in the sledge, with a bullet-hole through his head, while the elk, panic-stricken, dashed furiously away—refusing to obey the calls of its young master longer.

After repeated efforts to stop it without avail, Wingedfoot Fred turned back to Naida, who, white with terror, sat trembling in her sledge, while her dogs sat or lay panting on the ice, indifferent to everything except the presence of Bugle, who regarded them with lofty canine contempt.

"There, Naida, I guess he'll not threaten you nor try to kill me soon, again," the youth said, betraying some emotion.

"Oh, Wingedfoot!" cried the girl, "you must be hurt."

"I think not, though his bullet knocked me over. My thick woolen clothing must have stayed the ball. But, I'm surprised to hear that his name is Canada Carl, though he's acted mean enough to be old Satan himself. He came to Deer Lodge, last night, and said his name was Wyncoop, and that he was buying fur. I was takin' him to Buzzard Bend as an act of kindness, but I happened to upset our sledge comin' 'round that point, when he got mad as fury and we were havin' it when you come in sight."

"I knew he was away from the Bend," said Naida, "but I did not know he had gone to Deer Lodge or I should not have started for there."

"What kind of people live at Buzzard Bend, anyhow?" Fred questioned.

"Alas! sir, they are mostly bad people, I am sorry to confess," she replied, with a sense of shame. "My father, or rather my step-father, Henri Arnaud, and three other men, located there two years ago to follow the calling of honest hunters and trappers. Six months later came one Jean Dladocq, that man, Canada Carl, and four others—all bad men. Father Arnaud had left the St. Croix to escape the presence of Jean Dladocq. For some reason or other he holds a power over father that makes him his slave almost. Mr. Arnaud married my mother when I was a little girl, and he has always been a kind and loving father to me. Since mother died, a few months ago, he is all the friend I have had left, but Jean Dladocq comes now and demands of father my hand in marriage. He hates Dladocq as bitterly as I do, but he was forced to give his consent, and to-morrow night I was to have married him, and as a last resource to escape his power I determined to flee to Deer Lodge and ask the protection of the hunters there. As I have been in the habit of taking a daily ride with my

dogs, an opportunity to escape was easily afforded."

"Well, it's a good thing I upset our sledge, or I might 'a' run my head into a halter at Buzzard Bend," Wingedfoot observed.

"If you had ever set foot on Buzzard Bend, you would have been slain. There are now no less than thirty Indians camped there, brought by Canada Carl for the purpose of murdering and plundering a number of hunters at various camps. Deer Lodge was to have been one of them. Their object is to secure the stock of furs and peltries the hunters may have on hand. There are two other men there making counterfeit money, and, to still add to the wickedness of the place, a stranger arrived there a few days ago who seems to be an old friend of Carl's. I heard them talking one day about a man named Holland, at Deer Lodge. They seemed to be in doubt as to whether it was Holland, and Carl told him he would run down to the Lodge some day and see; so I suppose he has been there for that purpose."

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed Wingedfoot, indignantly. "He came there meek as Moses, and we treated him like a prince, and he might 'a' had a good laugh over his entertainment if he'd just kept his cloven hoof out of my sight a while longer. But, Miss Naida, you'll be welcome at Deer Lodge, and I'll be only too happy to conduct you— Ah! what now, Bugle?"

The hound had started with alarm, looking down the river, from which direction there suddenly swept into view a figure wrapped in a red blanket, and with his long black hair flying in the wind.

"Now, who's that?" asked Wingedfoot, as he capped the rifle lying in the hollow of his left arm.

Naida glanced back over her shoulder, then uttered a little cry, saying:

"It is Wolf Tooth—a desperate half breed Indian—the scout at Buzzard Bend! Be on your guard, Wingedfoot, for he is an ugly fellow. He must be following me. He is upon skates."

"Steady there, Bugle!" commanded Fred, for he knew the dog was ever ready to fly at the throat of an Indian.

The Indian came around the bend with such speed that, by the time he came to a stand, he was not over twenty feet from Wingedfoot and the girl.

He was a young savage, dressed in buckskin, with the blanket around him belted to his waist. His head was hatless and covered with a shock of coarse black hair, cut short in front, but hanging to his waist behind. His lips, being too short to cover his long, projecting upper teeth, gave him more the appearance of a beast than man. At his girdle he carried a knife and tomahawk.

At first the savage manifested some surprise at sight of Wingedfoot, but the expression of his face, and the glow of his eyes changed to those of a wolf when about to seize upon its prey.

"Hullo here, Wolf Tooth!" exclaimed Wingedfoot, with as much familiarity as though he had always known him, "out havin' some fun skatin', are you?"

"You Wingedfoot!" replied the half-breed in a queer tone, rendered so by the unnatural formation of his mouth and a defective palate.

"That is the call I answer to, up the crick," replied Fred; "but which way are you bound, Wolf?"

"Me fahler that girl," he replied.

"Wolf Tooth, why have you followed me?" demanded Naida.

"See whor you go to—but know nowh—you come toor meet thar pale-face, Wingedfoot."

"No, I did not; I was going to his cabin—to Deer Lodge."

"Hoo!" grunted the half-breed, with a most atrocious look, "you'll go-or back nowr to ther Roost, me mistrus'; yoor runnin' erway frumb home."

"Nary step 'll she go back unless she wants to!" declared Wingedfoot, in a most emphatic manner.

Without the least sign or warning, Wolf Tooth darted like a hawk upon the boy, seizing him by the throat. So violent was the collision that both fell heavily upon the ice. Bundled up as he was, Wingedfoot had been taken at a disadvantage. But, in his faithful hound he had a most valiant friend, for, no sooner had the foe seized him than Bugle was at the half-breed's throat.

Over and over on the ice, with cries, growls, and gasps, the three tumbled and rolled together.

Wolf Tooth very soon discovered that Wingedfoot was not his worst enemy to vanquish,

and when he felt the teeth of the dog tearing into the muscles of his neck and throat, he was compelled to release the boy and fight the dog.

Thus relieved, Wingedfoot crawled out from under the combatants and turned to help Bugle. But he saw the dog needed no help.

The half breed's tongue was already protruding from his mouth. His eyes were bulging from their sockets and bloody froth was upon his lips. Once the doomed wretch ceased almost to struggle, then, with a convulsive start, he threw himself from side to side, flinging the dog over and back—lashing the ice with his body until it seemed every bone inside the animal's skin must be crushed. But in vain were his efforts to shake off the hound; nor could his master call him off, until the half-breed's convulsions had ceased in death! Even then, Wingedfoot was compelled to choke the dog off, so frantic had he become by the taste of human blood.

During the whole of the conflict Wingedfoot had been too busily engaged to give Naida even a single look, but, when he had dragged Bugle away from the lifeless half-breed, he glanced around him. To his utter surprise and bitter disappointment he discovered that the girl was gone! He glanced up the river and down, but she was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER V.

ROMAN JACK—A STRANGE SOUND.

WINGEDFOOT FRED was astounded and perplexed. He knew not whether the girl had fled through fear of an unfavorable termination of the conflict or to escape further delay in her flight from Buzzard Bend.

But whatever motive had taken her away, Fred never once doubted her having gone on up the river, and at once prepared to follow. He removed the skates from the feet of the half-breed, whose body he then concealed under the snow along the river-bank. This done, he gathered up his robes and blankets and hid them away, then strapping the half breed's skates upon his own feet, he glided away up the river, increasing his speed as he went, until it taxed Bugle's utmost exertions to keep in sight of him.

On, mile after mile—like a young Mercury indeed, he flew until he finally came to where the river was for a short distance entirely covered with a thin layer of snow. There he stopped to look for the sledge-tracks. He searched the ice from shore to shore, but not a mark of any kind could he find except where the elk-sledge had gone down and back. Naida had not gone that way at all!

Fred was again disappointed but not discouraged. With his usual fine pluck and dogged perseverance he turned and began retracing his steps down the river. He soon reached the scene of his late adventures, but sped on like the wind. Two miles further on he glided past the mouth of the Manomine River, and another mile from there he stopped to look for tracks where a strip of snow reached entirely across the river. There he found two sledge-tracks. Both had been drawn by dogs. The tracks of the animals showed that they had gone in opposite directions. But with this discovery he still could not believe that Naida had from choice returned to Buzzard Bend and its perils, but that she had been dragged back by the dogs whose tracks showed they had traveled back in the wildest disorder.

Calling into action every energy of mind and body the determined boy hastened on down the river still in hopes of overtaking her; but his hopes were in vain. He never got even a glimpse of her or the sledge, although venturing within sight of the cabins of Buzzard Bend.

Turning about the boy began retracing his steps up the river at a leisurely pace, his mind engaged with many conflicting thoughts. He had by no means given up all hope of Naida's rescue from her perilous situation. As he approached the mouth of the Manomine it suddenly occurred to him that there was a dug-out, known as the Convict's Cave, in the bluff overlooking the confluence of that river with the Red River. The place had an unsavory history but this had been given it more through Indian superstition than any single fact warranted.

Fred knew it would afford a fine place of security and rest, no matter what its true history was. The boy had not a drop of superstitious blood in him, and in hopes of yet being able to assist Naida in some way or other, he concluded to seek the cave and remain there until nightfall, at least. Nor would he have long to remain for it was not long until night.

Having thus made up his mind, the youth finally turned from the Red River into the mouth of the Manomine. Behind him, and

upon his right, lay interminable pine forests. On his left, in the angle formed by the junction of the two streams, rose a steep bluff to the height of over two hundred feet. Its summit and the side next to the Red River were covered with trees, but the almost perpendicular slope facing the Manomine was devoid of all vegetation except some tall grass on the hillside and a fringe of bushes and vines along the bank of the stream.

In this bluff, about sixty rods from the larger river, was Convict Cave, toward which Fred was making his way when he suddenly discovered a man coming down the river toward him at a lively pace. He could see that the stranger was upon skates—that he wore a fur cap and short fur coat, and carried a rifle in his hands before him.

Wingedfoot stopped and awaited the man's approach, not knowing whether he was a friend or foe. Bugle squatted on the ice by his master's side, licked his ugly chops and yawned as if impatient for another fight.

Within forty paces of the young hunter, the stranger stopped, and, in a clear voice, called out:

"Hullo, stranger, what's the go with you and your pup?"

"We're just tryin' to figger out who and what you are?" Wingedfoot responded.

"Well, I'm Jack Towner, otherwise Roman Jack, hunter and—"

"And I'm Wingedfoot Fred, from Deer Lodge," broke in the youth, "and glorious glad to meet you Jack, old friend."

The two at once advanced toward each other, and soon their hands were clasped in happy greeting.

Roman Jack was a young man of two-and-twenty, with a tall, athletic form, a face with features strongly characteristic of a man of honor, pluck and courage. He had a magnificent dark brown eye, a rather prominent nose of the Roman type, a light-brown mustache, and long flowing hair of the same color. He was dressed in the winter garb of the hunter, and carried a rifle in his hands, a knife and pair of revolvers in his belt. Slung at his back was a small haversack in which he carried his rations.

This young hunter's quarters were more than fifty miles eastward on the banks of the Manomine. He and Wingedfoot Fred were old acquaintances, and the meeting of the hunters there was one of great surprise and joy.

"Dancin' goblins!" exclaimed Fred, when they met, "I never was so glad to meet any one in my life, Roman Jack, you big buccaneer!"

"I 'spected to meet you soon, Fred," responded Jack, "but I never expected to meet you here. But how've you been, Fred? How's Deer Lodge? Old Dismal? Columbia Jim and the Pilgrim? What are you doin' up here at this time o' day?"

"I was jist makin' for the Convict's Cave to spend the night."

"And I was just on my way to Deer Lodge to visit you. I got behind on account of so much snow on the river, makin' skatin' very heavy. But if you're goin' to stop at the dug-out I'll stay with you, to be sure. But is there any thing in the wind, Fred?"

"Indeed there is, Jack; I've been having a big run to-day, but let's get into the cave and I'll tell you all about it."

"All right, Fred, for it's goin' to be another stormy night—it is beginnin' to snow now."

Together the two advanced up the Manomine to the mouth of the old dug-out, whose entrance was almost closed by the snow-laden vines that hung over it; but, bending low, they crept into the retreat which they found dark as midnight. Roman Jack took a match from an inner pocket and lighted it. Its light revealed a large, spacious room, and also evidence of its having been occupied within the past few days. There were still the undisturbed ashes of their campfire, and, what was most pleasing to the boys, there was a goodly pile of dry fuel there that had been left by the last lodger. So the work of lighting a fire was but a few minutes' labor, and when the gloom of the place had been dispelled by the ruddy glow of the flame, the young hunters seated themselves and entered into conversation, Wingedfoot trusting their safety to the watchfulness of Bugle, who had stretched himself on the floor near the entrance with his nose between his paws.

Wingedfoot at once entered into a detailed account of his adventures that day with Canada Carl, Wolf Tooth, and the fair Naida. He also described the state of affairs at Buzzard Bend, as given him by the maiden, and the prospect for some lively work in the near future.

Roman Jack was astounded by all this, and when Fred had finished he said:

"By smoke! it's a good thing I met you or I might 'a' lost my hair. After I seen I couldn't reach Deer Lodge to-day, I concluded to stop over night with Naida and her father at Buzzard Bend."

"Then you have met them?" observed Fred.

"They staid over night at our cabin on the Manomine when they were on their way to the Bend two years ago. We thought at the time Henri Arnaud was a very foolish man takin' so bright and charming a girl as his daughter into the wilderness among Ingins and painters. But I presume he was fleedin' there to escape the persecutions of that man, Dladocq."

"No doubt of it, Jack, and, by the holy goblins, I'm goin' to see that she gets to Deer Lodge if she still wishes to go there."

"And I, Wingedfoot, will stay right with you," declared Jack.

Thus the two conversed for a couple hours when finally both arose and went out of the cave. It was dark as Egypt and snowing thick and fast.

"Another wild night," said Wingedfoot, returning to the dug-out; "I'm sorry to see this snow for it will obliterate every clew to Naida's—Great white spooks! what's that?"

Something like a subdued wail smote upon their ears and Bugle started up with a low growl and stood crouched as if for a spring. The next moment there came a dull crush outside the dug-out as though an avalanche from the hillside had landed upon the river. A cloud of snow was puffed into the cave covering the dog in white. Then again there came to the ears of the young hunters terrible, subdued groans as if of demons struggling in the throes of death down under the frozen depths of the voiceless Manomine.

CHAPTER VI.

POLAR SOL APPEARS ON THE SCENE.

WINGEDFOOT FRED and Roman Jack were most thoroughly startled and confused by the sounds that greeted their ears, and for a few moments their minds were active in endeavors to solve the mystery. They knew almost at a glance that the entrance to the cavern had been blocked, and they had about come to the conclusion that their retreat had been besieged by enemies when they discovered a pair of moccasined feet and buckskin-clad legs protruding from the snow-pile blocking the entrance. That the owner of these pedal extremities were alive was evident from the lively way in which they fairly fluttered in the air.

Wingedfoot Fred held back his dog, which seemed frantic to get at the heels of the unknown, with one hand, while with the other he held his revolver waiting the appearance of the rest of the "kicker" from the snow. But the fellow seemed unable to extricate himself from the pile and finally Fred observed:

"Jack, that critter's fast there, be he Ingins or white man."

"S'pose we snake him out by the heels?" suggested Jack.

"All right! Down now, Bugle, and be easy a moment."

The obedient hound crouched down and the boys advanced and seizing the unknown's heels endeavored to pull him out of the snow into the cave, but their efforts proved a failure. The man, or savage, seemed weighted down or wedged fast, but bracing themselves the boys again made an heroic effort to land the unknown. This time the body seemed to yield a few inches, but a smothered groan followed.

"We fetched him a little that time," remarked Fred, "or else we stretched his body out three or four inches longer. But, let's stretch him a mile long or pull him out—now again! yo-heah!"

For the third time they exerted their united strength until the joints in the unknown's legs fairly cracked under the strain. But they had the satisfaction of seeing the body being gradually withdrawn from the snow, and, taking breath and a new hitch on the moccasined heels, they hauled away until the hips, then the body, then the shoulders of a man were pulled into sight. They then supposed their labor would be completed when a few more inches of man should be dragged out, but in this they seemed mistaken, for what appeared to be the head was followed by a continuation of the same or another body. However, the boys hauled away. Six, seven, eight, and even more than ten feet of man was dragged out like a snake from a hole, and yet the further end was not visible.

"Ghost of old Goliath!" exclaimed Wingedfoot, in surprise. "What on earth have we struck, old pard?"

But before Roman Jack could answer, the snow-clad man-serpent warped up near the middle, broke in twain, and resolved itself into two distinct and different looking individuals—a white man and a savage warrior!

The young hunters stood aghast—silent, speechless. That the red-skin and white man were enemies—that they had been locked together in a dreadful death-struggle, was quite evident.

The combatants seemed blinded by the light into which they had been so unexpectedly conducted, and stood glaring around them with a look of surprise and real horror upon their faces.

With the exception of Bugle, who kept up a continuous growl, a dead silence was maintained by all for full a minute, when, owing to the blocked cavern filling with smoke almost to suffocation, the white combatant was forced to sneeze. The violent fling of the head shook the snow from his hair and beard, and then, as Fred caught a glimpse of his face, a light of recognition beamed in his eyes, and he exclaimed:

"If it isn't Old Polar Sol, may I be blessed!"

"An' I'll be eternally petrified, if you ain't Wingedfoot Fred, the Boy Mercury o' the Woods—the pistol-artist!" exclaimed the white man. "I'm numerous glad to meet you, boy, and jist as soon as I pulverize that pizen imp o' a savage I'll wobble your paw."

This friendly recognition of the whites excited the fears of the savage, and he stepped back, endeavoring to back out of the cave; but he soon found that egress was cut off by the snow blockade, but, game even in the face of odds, he whipped out his knife and stood ready to defend himself to the last.

"Red-skin," said Polar Sol, "you picturesque varlet, you'd as well ground your arms and surrender, as becomes a great warrior, and not go baboonin' with death. Perhaps you don't know that I'm Old Polar Sol, the Cold Wave o' the Nor'-west, and that by my side stands Wingedfoot Fred, a pistol-artist—one o' the Old Masters—who slings the paints o' destruction with the lavish hand o' a cyclone. No, smoky-rind; you're in no shape to buck the Cold Wave and the young artist from Deer Lodge."

If all this had any effect upon the savage, he did not let it be known by a single outward sign. He stood as immovable as a statue of stone, with every muscle apparently strung to utmost tension.

Old Polar and his friends saw that the red-skin was a desperate and powerful fellow, and that he did not intend to yield without a struggle. Fred and Roman Jack each held a pistol in his hand, but both knew that they were held within the scope of the savage's vision.

Seeing the Indian was not disposed to precipitate a conflict, Old Polar again said:

"Old Rusty Skin, which shall it be, fight or flight? This thing's got to come to a focus, in a hurry now."

While thus speaking, the form of the red-skin was seen to settle down like that of a tiger, and then, as soon as the hunter had uttered the last word, with the quickness of a cat he shot forward toward Polar with a fierce cry. But in making the leap, his head had struck against the low roof of the cave with such violence that he was hurled back prostrate upon the ground, and before he could regain his feet Old Polar gave him a kick in the stomach that curled him up breathless upon the earth. Then he was quickly overpowered and bound hand and foot.

"Now, Wingedfoot, my boy, give me a quake o' your paw," said Old Polar, "for I'm sardonic glad to meet you."

"And the same to you, Polar," responded Wingedfoot, "and here is my young friend, Roman Jack."

"Roman Jack," said the old man taking Towner's hand, "I'm frantic glad to make your 'quaintance and wobble your paw, for I know by the light o' your eyes, and the graceful curve o' your nose that you are a hull Roman holiday on a fight."

Roman Jack now had a square look at Polar Sol, a man of whom he had often heard. He must have been fifty odd years of age, of medium height, rather lean and angular, with keen dark blue eyes and a long, sharp aquiline nose. His head and neck were covered with a short grizzly hair. He wore his beard cut short except under his chin where it hung down like the beard of a goat.

"You're not at all sparlin' of your praises, Polar Sol," responded Roman Jack, "however much or little I deserve them. But I am sure Polar Sol has met with a lively adventure to-night."

"Wal, I'd rather say I'd had a fit o' fun at any rate; and that smart, red varlet there realizes now, I suppose, that the Cold Wave

struck him in his summer quarters. A red-skin that can't read the almanack of the sky, and distinguish atwixt a local blizzard and a Cold Wave from the Nor'-west is a poor, benighted varlet, indeed."

"But it seems to me the Injin was holdin' the Cold Wave a pretty stiff tug," remarked Roman Jack with a smile.

"Mebbe it seems so, but he'll never buck up to another Nor'-wester, the bold heathen."

"But I'd like to know how the Cold Wave and the heathen bold come to be wallowin' 'round in the snow together," said Fred.

"It comes o' the red-skin's curiosity," answered Polar. "I swept down from the boreal caves to reconnoiter Buzzard Bend, about which there's some ugly suspicions bein' raised on 'count o' a gang o' Injins hangin' 'round there known to be at war with everybody but outlaws. Wal, I made the reconnoissance, and as night was comin' on I pulled out for this cave to bunk till mornin'. As I had to come over the hills through the woods to elude a party o' excited Buzzard-Benders on the river opposite the cabins, it made me late, and as I was comin' down the bluff above this cave, I come up ker-bump gainst that red-skin in the dark and storm. I s'pose he'd got sight o' me and thought he'd take me in and endeavored to head me off. We grappled each other and over we tumbled in the snow, and down the slope we rattled like two horned elks. All the snow on the hillside seemed to let loose and come with us to see the fun, and 'bout the next thing I knew was of somethin' pullin' at my heels. At fu'st I thought it war a bear, and wished I war at the other end o' the snow-pile. But the Injin held on to my mane and so I grupp'd away on his tail we war landed."

All efforts at conversation with the Indian proved unsuccessful. Either he could not or would not understand a word of English, and even when Old Polar addressed him in his own dialect, he maintained a defiant and stolid silence.

Seating themselves, finally, the three discussed the situation. Wingedfoot Fred narrated his adventures with William Wyncoop, the meeting with Naida, the coming of Wolf Tooth, and the flight of the girl while engaged in conflict with the half-breed.

"And you say you don't know what become o' the gal?" Old Polar remarked.

"I only know that she turned back down the river, and I supposed went back to the cabins at the Bend."

"Sword o' Old Gideon!" exclaimed Polar Sol, "I'll bet a Greenland iceberg she never went back to the Roost o' Buzzard Bend, and I'll tell you why: as I war comin' down the river, 'bout five miles beyond the Bend, I had just turned aside into the mouth o' a little crick, when a dog-sledge went whiskin' past up the river like the wind. Before I could git back to the river and git a fair view o' the outfit, it was gone from sight. The occupant was all bundled up and cuddled down in the sledge, so I couldn't tell whether 'twas a gal or boy, but I judged by the white hood it war a gal."

"That was Naida!" exclaimed Fred, "but, where in the name of mercy can she be going, in the face of the storm?"

"The Lord only knows!" answered Polar; "but, at the time, I naterally supposed that whoever it was knowed their own business; and as I hadn't any chance to meddle, I give the matter no more concern. But if it's your gal, Naida, I tremble for the poor thing. The nearest p'int where she could strike shelter is twenty or twenty-five miles down the river at Father Lille's cabin, or the camp o' the French-Canadian squatters."

"She cannot, or may not reach there to-night, in the face of this storm," declared Roman Jack.

"If she doesn't, then she will surely perish," added Old Polar.

"Friends!" cried Wingedfoot Fred, springing to his feet, "if that girl perishes in this storm, I too will perish in searching for her."

"Fred, you're not goin' out to-night?"

"I'm going to start at once," Fred declared.

"Then you don't go alone," averred Roman Jack, "for I am goin' with you!"

"And, by the sword o' Gideon!" exclaimed Old Polar, "if that's your go, the Cold Wave o' the Nor'-west will blow along with you."

CHAPTER VII.

FATHER LILLE.

TWENTY-FIVE miles down the Red River was a little settlement known as Frenchtown. It was settled up wholly by French-Canadians, who had squatted there in the wilderness to eke

out a scanty livelihood by hunting, fishing and the cultivation of a few rods of ground in wheat and garden vegetables. As most of the men were too lazy and shiftless to do much hunting and trapping, the burden of supporting the families fell upon the women and children. For some reason or other, they had never been molested by hostile Indians, but this was probably attributed to the influence of one Father Lille, a Jesuit missionary, who had converted to the faith of Loyola most of the squatters and many of the nearest Indians.

Father Lille's cabin was situated upon the bank of the river about two miles from Frenchtown, amid a dense growth of stately pines. It was a large, commodious building with two bedrooms, a kitchen and sitting-room.

For more than sixteen years had Father Lille resided there, undergoing all the hardships, privations and dangers to which any man laboring for the good of men's souls had ever been subjected in the wilderness of the Northwest. He was beloved by all who knew the gentleness of his nature and the kindness of his heart. His door was always open to white man or red without question, and his hospitality had become proverbial throughout that region.

It is upon the same night that we left the three hunters at Convict Cave that we would introduce Father Lille and his household to the reader.

It was storming without, but before an open fireplace wherein burned a glowing fire sat the priest and his two female companions.

Father Lille was a man of sixty years of age, with a large and powerful frame that bore lightly the weight of so many years of incessant toil. His face was smoothly shaven, bearing the marks of time, but with the expression of a kindly nature.

The eldest of the two females was a negress, the missionary's housekeeper. She was a woman of fifty or more years, a fat and good-natured soul, partaking greatly of her master's kindness of heart and religious fervor.

The third person was a young girl of perhaps seventeen years, the adopted daughter of Father Lille. She was a perfect type of womanhood and intellectual grace. She had a sweet and lovable face and eyes that were most wondrous in their expression.

Seated in a comfortable arm-chair, Father Lille was reading to his companions. Finally he laid the book aside and entered into a discussion of the subject of which he had been reading with his daughter Ruth. From this subject they drifted into that of the weather.

"I pray no one is abroad to-night," observed Father Lille, "or they will surely perish."

"This storm, father," said Ruth, "will prevent your going to Buzzard Bend to perform that marriage ceremony there to-morrow night."

"When that man was here to engage me to solemnize the marriage, I made provisions for stormy weather," replied the missionary; "and it now looks as though I was wise in doing so, that there may be no disappointment if I do not go."

"But, bress de good master," spoke up Old Zoe, the negress, "but de missus ob de house will be dis'p'inted if she hab hull boat ob nice flummigis cooked for de weddin' supper."

"The cookery'll keep, Zoe," replied the missionary, "this weather, perhaps better than the patience of the bride and—"

"Bress de soul ob my body!" suddenly exclaimed the negress, as there came a rap upon the door.

Not a little surprised, Father Lille advanced and opened the door. The light streaming out revealed to him the presence of a man clad in fur coat and cap covered with snow.

"Good-evening, sir," the stranger quickly said; "is this the cabin of Father Lille?"

"It is, stranger; walk in out of the storm and consider yourself housed for the night," said the kind-hearted priest.

"I am only too glad to accept your hospitality," replied the stranger, "more particularly since your cabin has been my destination for many days."

The man entered the house as he thus spoke. The missionary assisted him to remove his overcoat and cap and seated him before the fire.

The new-comer was a man of about forty years of age, with a slender figure and a pale, sickly-looking face pinched with cold. He was a total stranger to the missionary and his family but the good host soon made him feel as much at ease as though he were an old acquaintance.

The unknown, seated before the fire, stretched out his thin, bony fingers that were half-cramped

with cold to warm them: and after he had been seated there awhile he was seized with a fit of coughing that seemed to give him some distress.

"Sir," said Lille, after the man had ceased coughing, "you are not a very robust man to be cut on such a night. You seem to have some pulmonary trouble."

"Indeed, sir," replied the man, in a husky voice, "scarcely this winter is between me and the grave."

"Then why have you exposed yourself on this dreadful night?"

"Duty, sir—duty of conscience, duty to my soul and to others sent me out," declared the wayfarer.

"And whither are you bound?"

"I'm at my journey's end."

"Ah, indeed," replied the priest somewhat puzzled by the stranger's evasive talk.

Presently Ruth brought the man a cup of hot coffee which she bade him drink to stay his strength until Zoe could prepare him something to eat.

"Thank you, miss," the stranger said; "but alas! that I should ever live to accept a kindness from your fair hands."

"And why not, pray?" Father Lille asked, as Ruth retired blushing under the stranger's compliments.

The man, however, did not appear to hear his question and began sipping the coffee. When he had finally emptied the cup, he turned to Lille and said:

"Whenever you have time to hear me, I should like a private talk with you. It is for that purpose I have come hundreds of miles."

"Indeed?" exclaimed the priest; "but your supper is now ready, and after you have eaten I will be at your service."

The man was conducted into the kitchen and seated at the table, old Zoe attending him.

Returning to Ruth in the sitting-room and closing the kitchen door, the priest said:

"I do wonder what that man can have to say?"

"I do not know," replied Ruth, "but his remark to me I thought sounded a little strangely."

"So it struck me, daughter, and instantly my mind reverted to a wintry night years ago when you first became an inmate of this cabin. But then the man's remark may have no particular meaning—he may only be some penitent driven by remorse of conscience to seek spiritual consolation at the last hour. However, we'll soon know what his mission is—Ah! another knock at the door!—another penitent, perhaps!"

True enough, the conversation of the priest and his daughter had been interrupted by a soft rap upon the door, and rising he advanced and opened it. And an exclamation burst from his lips as he did so, for he beheld a female form clad in furs standing before him!

"Are you Father Lille?" she asked, in a sweet girlish tone, before the priest could speak.

"Yes, my child, I am Father Lille," the astonished missionary replied.

"And can I get lodging here, to-night?" was again asked.

"Come in, my child, come in," said Lille, "and tell me, in the name of heaven, who you are and whence came you this stormy night?"

The girl tripped into the warm room and as Father Lille closed the door she lifted her eyes to his and said, in humble modesty:

"My name is Naida Quesne. I came from Buzzard Bend. I am a fugitive from there, and seek safety under your roof."

"My child," said the missionary, "you astound me. You Naida Quesne! and to-morrow night I was to have been at Buzzard Bend to join you in wedlock with Jean Dladocq. My child, why are you here? why a fugitive from home?"

"Because I will be the bride of death before I will ever be the bride of Jean Dladocq!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INVALID'S CONFESSION.

RUTH assisted the fugitive maiden to remove her wraps, and when the figure and face of the girl had been thus relieved, the priest and his daughter were amazed at her beauty.

"Surely, my sweet sister," said Ruth, "you have not traveled all the way from Buzzard Bend on foot and alone?"

"I came alone, but most of the way in a dog-sledge," Naida answered; "though I was compelled to abandon the sledge and turn the dogs loose over a mile from here, so tired and cross and unruly did they become. But I had caught a glimpse of your light and soon made the distance here on foot."

"It is a wonder, my child, you ever reached here alive," Father Lille said in surprise and astonishment.

"I can stand much cold," Naida said; "I am used to it; but in the first place I started up the river in hopes of seeking refuge at Deer Lodge, the home of four hunters and trappers. Shortly after starting I met one of the four, a young man named Wingedfoot Fred, who was bringing home one of our men who had been to Deer Lodge. The youth and the man were having some trouble when I first met them. The man, who was Canada Carl, ordered me back home, when words ensued between him and Wingedfoot which resulted in the exchange of shots and the death no doubt of Canada Carl. He was in the boy's elk-sledge at the time, and the elk becoming alarmed, dashed away up the river with his body. A few moments later, who should come in pursuit of me than Wolf Tooth, a cunning half-breed Indian. He and Wingedfoot got into an altercation, and during the struggle my dogs became panic-stricken, and turning, fled down the river toward home with me. But I managed to get them under control when nearly opposite the cabins of the Bend, and, as no one was in sight, I made up my mind to keep on down the river and seek refuge at your cabin. I have heard so much of your kindness to strangers, that I felt sure you would not send me back to Buzzard Bend. I cannot marry Jean Dladocq—I do not love him. He is a wicked man, and between death without him and life with him, I prefer death a hundred times."

"My poor child!" said the good missionary consolingly, "rest your young soul in peace; no act of mine shall ever bring sorrow and unhappiness upon your head!"

"Your father must be cruel, Nadia," said Ruth, "if he would have you marry a man you abhor."

"Henri Arnaud is only my step-father," replied Naida, "and yet he has been a kind and noble father to me in every respect except in this matter. And even he dislikes Dladocq. We fled from the St. Croix country to Buzzard Bend to elude him, but he found out our whereabouts and followed us. He holds father Arnaud in his power in some way, and it is through this power he demands me in marriage. Since Dladocq's coming there, other bad men like Canada Carl and his followers have taken up their quarters there in spite of the protests of those who would lead an honorable life. Quite lately another man came there and brought with him from over in Dakota no less than forty bloodthirsty Indians. Their object I know is plunder. Canada Carl was sent to Deer Lodge as a spy to ascertain the amount of furs the hunters there had on hand, as well as to learn something of one of the hunters. In going to Deer Lodge I expected to put the hunters there on their guard as well as escape from Dladocq's power."

"When was this murderous work to be done?" asked Father Lille.

"Just as soon as the river broke up so that they could raft their plunder down the stream to some point of safety," replied Naida.

"Truly, my child, these are serious charges to prefer against the people at Buzzard Bend," the missionary said; "but there are some things come to my own personal knowledge of the situation of affairs there that have aroused some suspicion, and I understand that even now a noted hunter, named Polar Sol, is investigating affairs about Buzzard Bend. But as to Wingedfoot Fred: then you do not know whether he was slain or not?"

"No, sir," Naida replied with a sadness in her tone, "but I have been afraid all the time that he was slain, for Wolf Tooth was a powerful warrior."

At this juncture the first caller came in from his supper when Ruth taking Naida retired to the kitchen and closed the door.

The missionary told the stranger of his second caller, though he said nothing of her being a fugitive, nor of the secrets of Buzzard Bend, and as soon as possible changed the subject by saying:

"And now, my dear sir, I have not been hasty about inquiring your name, and yet would be pleased to know whom I have the pleasure of entertaining."

"My name, Aaron Doane; and my home is in Michigan," the man said, "and seeing we are now alone, I desire to unburden my soul to you and prevent, if possible, a further wrong to an innocent being."

"Go on, Mr. Doane," said Lille, seating himself near the man so that he could catch every word, for Doane's voice was feeble.

"To begin with," said Doane, "I infer the young lady who kindly brought me a cup of coffee is your adopted daughter?"

Father Lille started.

"To be sure," he answered, "she is my adopted child; but why do you speak of that? What do you know of my family—my daughter?"

"That's what I have come here to speak about," Doane responded; "for, fourteen years ago, I left the little child at your door that has grown into a lovely and noble woman."

"Then you are the father of my daughter, Ruth?" exclaimed the priest.

"Listen, Father Lille, and I will tell the whole story. Some months ago my physician informed me I could live but a year at most. This information began to prey upon my conscience. I hadn't led the most exemplary life, though I had been guilty of but one mean crime. This I saw an opportunity of atoning for to a certain extent, and that's what brought me here."

"Twenty years ago, when quite young, I was a wild and reckless youth. In one Harold Walsingham I had a boon companion. He was a little older than I, and, I should say, a little meaner. His mother was an Italian, and he seemed to inherit from her all the secret and deadly vindictiveness so characteristic of that race. He was a large, handsome fellow, who boasted of his conquests in female society. Finally he became acquainted with a Miss Edith Murch, with whom he fell desperately in love. Miss Murch was a most excellent and accomplished young lady, worthy of the best man on earth. In one David Holland my friend Walsingham had a rival. Holland was a poor but noble young man, of pure, upright character. Moreover, he was a first cousin of Walsingham. In the contest for Miss Murch's hand David Holland won. The best of feeling had never existed between the cousins, and now the breach was made wider. All the revengeful spirit of Walsingham was aroused, and he swore that he would ruin and wreck the lives of Holland and his wife. In this I and one Alfred Phillis were his aiders and abettors."

"Well, two years went by. Walsingham hounded the young couple persistently, watching for an opportunity to strike. But before he had accomplished anything, Edith Murch-Holland died, leaving a child—a daughter of one year. Holland at once placed this child in the care of a married sister living at a settlement on the Mississippi River in Eastern Minnesota."

"After the death of Edith it seems Walsingham's spirit of revenge burned as fierce as ever, and he at once fixed his designs on the child in hopes of adding anew to Holland's sorrow. It ran along two years when Alf Phillis and I succeeded in kidnapping the child one winter evening and carried her off. You know the rest, Father Lille. That child was left one winter night at your door, with a note pinned upon her cloak saying that the child's own father left it there, and commended it to your kindness and mercy. This falsehood was resorted to that you might make no inquiry, and in hopes her whereabouts would remain a secret."

"My God! then this is the life history of the little storm-waif—of my Ruth!" exclaimed the missionary, excitedly. "Oh! the shameless crimes! the wickedness of this world!—But pardon me, Doane, what of the wronged father, David Holland?"

"Well, he searched and searched for the child, aided by scores of men, but the search was finally given up, all believing the child had wandered off and been devoured by wild beasts. Two years later Holland went to California, to Nevada, to the war of Secession, and that was the last ever heard of him until about six months ago."

"It seems that some time after the abduction Alf Phillis was compelled to flee to Canada to escape the law for some crime. In the province he became a leader of outlawry under the name of Canada Carl. In the course of time he drifted back up the Red River into the States, and about six months ago he met a hunter whom he thought resembled Dave Holland. He was not sure because he did not speak with the hunter. Moreover, he had not seen Holland but once or twice in his life. But he wrote to Walsingham of his discovery. Walsingham came to me with the letter. He couldn't believe it was Holland, but to make sure he sent word to Phillis, who was with a party of hunters and trappers at a place called Buzzard Bend—"

"Buzzard Bend!" exclaimed Lille; "it is within twenty-five miles of here; but again, pardon my interruption, sir."

"He sent word to Phillis to ascertain beyond question whether the person he'd seen was Holland or not and report to him; but at last accounts he'd heard nothing from Phillis. But, sir, if the matter had been permitted to drop there perhaps I would not now be here. But it

wasn't. The devil kept supplying material for Walsingham's villainous instincts to work upon. By the death of a relative in the East somewhere Harold Walsingham and David Holland, or their heirs if they were dead, became heirs to a large property. Walsingham wanted it all and if he had gone on and claimed it upon the grounds of Holland and his heirs being dead he would doubtless have got it. But now he became afraid of me. As to Phillis he had no fears, for he being under indictment for murder and forgery would not dare to let his existence be known.

"Being as I was, on the verge of the grave, I told Walsingham one day that I could not die with my soul unburdened—that the abduction of that child haunted me constantly. I told him that I would make a dying confession of that crime but would implicate no one but myself.

"He cursed me for being a coward. He swore that even if I did make even that much of a confession he would straightway go and kill the child of David Holland, and that her blood would be upon my head. To save the girl I promised him I would make no confession. But he was suspicious of me, and I am satisfied he made a secret attempt to assassinate me. How, I need not narrate, but failing in that the villain left the country.

"I found out he had gone West and I made up my mind then that he meant mischief to the heir of David Holland, and I determined, if life and strength lasted me, to head him off. So I set out for your cabin to tell you this. I have now done so and accept the consequences."

"Ah, me!" sighed the old missionary, "it is a sad thing all around, Mr. Doane; and the saddest of all is to think that the sorrow of that poor father in the loss of his child has been my joy in the possession of her. To me she has become as dear as though of my own flesh and blood. I have given all the time outside of my duties as a faithful missionary to her education and comfort. I have been a father, a teacher and protector to her. She has all the tender traits and instincts of a noble Christian woman. While too young to remember anything of her life before coming here, she has not been kept in ignorance of how she became an inmate of my home. She seems happy and contented. She loves the wild-woods, the rivers and the lakes. She goes often on missions of mercy and kindness to the cabins of the squatters, and the villages of the Indians. She has administered to the needy and cared for the sick. It would be a crime in the sight of High Heaven for any man to harm a hair of her head, and so long as I have life no harm shall ever come to her."

"Harold Walsingham would care no more for her life and happiness than you would for that of a fly," asserted Doane, "and if he should ever come here, mark my word, Father Lille, he will come with devilish designs, and your life will not stand a moment in the way of—"

The speaker's words were here cut short by the door being suddenly thrown wide open and the unceremonious intrusion of a strange man, of a large and powerful build. At sight of the intruder's face, Aaron Doane sprang to his feet and starting back, pointed to the stranger, crying out:

"Father Lille, beware! that man is Harold Walsingham!"

CHAPTER IX.

A GATHERING STORM.

"YES," exclaimed the tall intruder, pausing a step or two from the door, "I am Harold Walsingham, and you are Aaron Doane! And knowing me, good priest and pale penitent, let me introduce to you my friend, Jean Dladocq, and others, whose names are not material to you."

As he spoke another man, Jean Dladocq, in fact, entered the room, followed by a third and fourth white man and four Indian warriors, the latter wrapt in blankets thrown over their heads and girded about their waists.

"Gentlemen, my door is always opened to the wayfarer," said Father Lille, confronting the intruders, "but he who enters unannounced does not manifest respect for his host."

"Father Lille," responded Dladocq, in an attempt at justification, "would you have a fellow-man stand upon ceremony when he was almost perishing with cold? Besides I am half-crazed to know whether a young lady, who disappeared from our place to-day—my affianced wife—is here, or has perished in the storm."

"If you mean Miss Naida Quesne," replied the priest, "she is here, safe and well—now with my daughter in the kitchen."

"I mean Naida Quesne," replied Jean Dladocq, "and the wedding that was to be to-morrow

night can as well be to-night and save you the trip to Buzzard Bend."

"There will be no compulsory weddings here to-night, or anywheres else, to-morrow night!" exclaimed the priest, with firmness.

"Ah!" exclaimed Dladocq, with a sneer, "I suppose the girl has been chirping something to you."

"Do you know why she is here, Mr. Dladocq?" questioned Lille.

"Whatever it is it makes no difference to me. I am not a man to be thwarted," answered Dladocq, quickly.

The white men during this conversation had removed their caps and unbuttoned their coats, and the red-skins dropped their blankets from their heads back upon their shoulders. The former had revolvers in their belts, the latter knives and tomahawks.

"Your language implies a threat," responded Lille to Dladocq's remarks, "unless I mistake your tone."

"It implies business, at any rate," the villain, for such he was, retorted in a blustering tone.

"And, if my friend Doane there," put in Walsingham, "has been here long, Father Lille, you doubtless know his mission and mine, also. He has told you, I presume, that the little waif left at your door fourteen years ago—now grown to beautiful womanhood, I am told, has become an heiress. He may have come here to conduct her to her rightful house and inheritance—at least to notify her of the waiting fortune. But as I'm joint heir with her, since her father is dead, I claim the right to her guardianship as next of kin and am here to conduct her East."

"Ah! you would conduct her to ruin—to death, Harold Walsingham!" cried the missionary, impetuously. "It was your heartlessness that tore her from her father and sent her here!"

"So then, Aaron Doane," sneered Walsingham, a vindictive fire flashing in his white, steely eyes, as he turned upon the invalid, "you have turned traitor! Your health has permitted your coming here a whining penitent at the feet of a canting priest. You should have known more than to undertake to thwart me, so you need not complain of the result of your folly. I know not what you have told the missionary, but I, without the immediate fear of death before me, have the same right to atone for a wrong done that you have. I confess that I was the cause—you the instrument—of Holland's child being stolen and carried to this missionary's door; and I now intend to make a restitution, as far as in my power, for that wrong, and I am here for the purpose of restoring Holland's child to her friends and fortune—to befriend her."

"You would befriend her as the wolf does the lamb," retorted Doane, his eyes flashing and the hectic flush on his pallid cheeks glowing brighter. "Harold Walsingham, you are laying a villain's game, and I warn you, Father Lille, to never allow that maiden to leave here with him!"

"There is no need of that warning, for the maiden will not go hence without my consent," Father Lille assured him.

"So then you propose to stand in the way of my atonement—you, a man of God?" queried Walsingham, in an affected tone of injured innocence.

"You have not entered my house like one who would redress a wrong," responded Lille, "but more like one half thwarted in an evil design. I trust and treat men according to their merits, and, sir, until you can show that you are honest in your avowed kindness to my adopted daughter, she cannot leave my roof."

"Perhaps, Father Lille, you may say the same by me and my little sweetheart, Naida," observed Jean Dladocq.

"No one has ever sought my aid but what it has been freely given, when in the interest of right and justice," replied the missionary. "Naida has sought my roof as shelter from the storm, and my protection from a life of misery and shame, and as long as she continues to make these claims, I shall protect and defend her with all my power—yea, my life!"

"God bless the soul of my grandmother!" exclaimed Dladocq sarcastically; "you're a self-ordained guardian for all the waifs and pretty girls in the land; but, old man, be you priest or devil, that girl will go back with me to Buzzard Bend my wife! It will be useless to threaten, remonstrate or appeal. I desire to speak with Naida, and you will do well to bring her into this room. If you refuse to bring her in, I will have to find her myself. Now let this suffice."

"And while you are about it, Father Lille," said Walsingham, "I would suggest you con-

duct your daughter in, also. I would like to converse with her in your presence."

Father Lille stepped back and placed himself against the door opening into the kitchen, his stalwart figure towering almost to the ceiling, his venerable face wrought with a determined expression and his eyes flashing with the light of a great soul aroused by a sense of impending peril.

Jean Dladocq spoke to the Indians in an undertone, when the savages at once passed around in front of their white companions and advanced toward the priest, their eyes gleaming with devilish cunning, their hands upon their tomahawks.

"Back! back, villains! I command you, in the name of God!" thundered the missionary in startling tones.

The savages involuntarily stopped.

Aaron Doane, pale and haggard, took advantage of this momentary silence to rise and say:

"I have but a short time to live, at best, and I can hasten the end of life in no better way than by standing by the cause of this grand old man and the lives of those girls!"

Stepping back against the wall the invalid drew from his pocket a pair of pistols and stood facing the savages and their white allies, a look of desperate determination upon his pallid face.

A still greater silence seemed to follow this act of Doane. Walsingham fairly trembled at the look he gave him, though affecting a smile of contempt. Not a word was spoken, but the silence that reigned at that moment was the calm that precedes the furious burst of the storm.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORM BURSTS.

AFTER the arrival of Dladocq and Walsingham at Father Lille's cabin, Ruth and her fair fugitive-guest were not ignorant of what passed in the sitting-room, although the door between it and the kitchen was closed. No sooner had Dladocq spoken to the missionary than Naida recognized his loud, blustering voice, and her young heart grew sick with terror.

Under the circumstances the girls felt justified in listening to what was said. They soon learned that Dladocq was in pursuit of Naida, and that even Ruth herself was being demanded by one of the intruders—a person claiming to have left her a waif at the door of Father Lille's cabin.

Both the maidens were thrown into a state of great fear and excitement, and, finally, when they heard Dladocq demanding the presence of Naida, and his demands coupled with threats, Naida said to her companion:

"Ob, Ruth! I prefer death in the storm to life in that man's power. I will flee this minute—while I can!"

And in spite of Ruth and old Zoe's appeals and entreaties she put on her cloak, hood and mittens to depart.

A door opened from the kitchen into the back-yard on the west side of the cabin, and as she bid her friends adieu and turned to open it, Ruth said:

"Wait a moment, Naida, and I will go with you and conduct you to the nearest of the French-Canadians' cabins."

Naida stopped. Ruth hastily put on her furs and overshoes, and having addressed a few words to Zoe was ready to start.

Naida opened the door. As she did so, she started back with a little cry of terror for she found herself confronted by a man who was standing just outside the door.

"Naida," said the man gliding softly into the room, "do not fear me—do not be alarmed—"

"Oh! it is Wingedfoot Fred!" the maiden exclaimed, and in her wild joy at seeing him alive, she grasped his arm and clung to it as if it were a refuge from danger. "God be thanked," she whispered, "that you are alive. I was so afraid the Indian had killed you. But this, Wingedfoot Fred, is my new-found friend, Ruth Lille. We were just going to start away to escape the enemies who at this moment confront good Father Lille in the adjoining room."

"How many are there, Naida?" the young hunter asked.

"Eight—four white men and four Indians."

Wingedfoot Fred advised the light in the kitchen to be put out, and when this was done, he held a whispered consultation with the girls. Then advancing, he applied his ear to a little knot-hole in the door and listened a few moments to the conversation going on in the adjoining room; then turned and hurried from the cabin. Meanwhile, Father Lille and Aaron Doane stood confronting their enemy. Walsingham and Dladocq stood behind the red-skins, calmly awaiting their movements to precipitate the conflict. Of the result they had no doubt, for

Father Lille was unarmed. But before a blow was struck—while the savages hesitated—the door behind Lille was suddenly thrown open and a voice behind the priest said:

"Father, step back into this room; friends are here!"

Involuntarily, it seemed, Lille stepped backward into the kitchen, drawing Doane in with him. A savage made a dash after them, but received a blow that staggered him back against his companions, causing a momentary confusion.

At the same instant the kitchen was lighted up, and to the surprise and horror of the outlaws and savages, they beheld, just within the room, with drawn revolvers, Wingedfoot Fred, Roman Jack and Old Polar Sol, with the hound, Bugle, crouching before them!

A cry of surprise broke from the lips of Dladocq, while a muttered curse was hissed from the lips of Walsingham.

"Scat, there, you bloody varlets!" yelled Old Polar, as he sent the savage reeling back into the room, for it was he who struck the blow, "or, by the sword o' Gideon, you'll be smote hip and thigh! Behold in me, Polar Sol, the Cold Wave o' the Nor'west, and upon my right Wingedfoot Fred, the Pistol-Artist, and on my left Roman Jack, the Death-Jav'lin. We're here for a Roman holiday, and if you want to buck the Cold Wave, the Master Artist, and the Javelin-Gladiator, and this pup, Old War-Dog himself, sail into the ampitheater. Yes, you valorious varlets, if you want a skrimmage, why, skrim away, and understand that if there's to be any weddin's here to-night, we'll 'ficiate. Do you hear the rumble, hey?"

"To the devil with your vaporings!" shouted Jean Dladocq, who had somewhat recovered from his shock, "you need not think blustering bravado will frighten us."

"Then h'ist yer anchor and sail in."

"We did not come here to shed human blood," Walsingham remarked, "but if we cannot settle by compromise the object of our visit, we will not hesitate to strike, and strike with a vengeance. Understand that?"

"We understand it, sir," replied Old Polar Sol, "and will now and for all time say that you can't compromise anything that includes the possession o' them gals. Now strike, or git!"

As the old hunter uttered the last word, the lamp behind him was blown out and the kitchen enveloped in gloom. This seemed the signal for the attack, and quicker than thought the three hunters raised their revolvers and fired at the savages nearest them.

As the red-skins went down with a moan, the door of the sitting-room burst open and no less than a dozen more savages, who had been waiting the sound of conflict as a signal to enter, rushed into the room, and with drawn tomahawks joined in the combat. The presence of these savages was unknown to the hunters, but, nothing daunted, they bravely stood their ground; and then and there, under that humble roof where naught but love and affection had dwelt—where naught but songs of praise had resounded—the crack of revolvers, the yells of savages, and the curses of outlaws were mingled in the frightful din of a deadly conflict.

CHAPTER XI.

A VICTORY AND YET DEFEAT.

JEAN DLADOCQ and Harold Walsingham were too shrewd to risk their own precious lives in the chances of war, for no sooner had the conflict opened than they dodged into an angle of the room out of sight of the hunters. They did not deem it necessary that they should expose themselves. They had brought the red-skins to do their murderous work, and with more than half a score to three they had no doubt of the result.

But never were men taken at a greater disadvantage than those outlaws and red-skins. The latter were armed with tomahawks and knives, and must pass through the partition door to strike a deadly blow. They were fully exposed in the light from the fire on the hearth, while the three hunters stood concealed in the darkness of the kitchen, and as the red-skins could only pass through the door one at a time, that passage became a Thermopylae to them. As soon as one appeared therein he was shot down, and in a few moments the opening was half-blocked with their bodies.

Two of Dladocq and Walsingham's white friends had taken a hand in the conflict, and succeeded in firing a few random shots into the kitchen, one of which passed so close to Ruth's

face that, with a cry of fear, she and Naida sought shelter in the bedroom whither Old Zoe in terror had already preceded them.

From their safe retreat in the corner Dladocq and Walsingham soon discovered that the trappers occupied an almost impregnable position, and after half their friends had been shot down, and that, too, without inflicting the slightest injury upon the foe so far as they could determine, the two master-villains determined to escape while they could; and bounding across the room and out into the night, they called upon those that were left to follow, and in a moment every living savage had beat an inglorious retreat from the cabin, leaving their dead and wounded behind.

Old Polar now expected the foe would renew the attack through the outer kitchen door, where they could have the benefit of the darkness, and prepared to meet the assault from that quarter; but to his surprise it was never made.

The moaning of old Zoe in the bedroom drew Father Lille to her side. The room was dark, and a cold current of air drawing through it. He saw the window was opened and as he could not hear or see Ruth and Naida a dreadful fear seized upon his mind.

"Zoe!" cried the missionary, "why is that window open? Where are the girls?"

"Oh, Lor'! Massa Lille!" moaned the negress, in terror, "they done gone away!"

"Gone where? In Heaven's name tell me quick, woman?" the old man fairly gasped.

"De poo' young missuses war mos' frighten to death, and when de men war fightin' Ruth she open de windy and jump out an' run away, de Lor' only knows whar!"

Old Polar and the boys overheard this startling information, and as the missionary came out the old hunter said:

"After all, our victory is defeat; we whipped the varlets but they have got the gals."

"Oh, I hope not!" exclaimed the priest in agony of mind; "beside themselves with terror, they escaped from the house and may be in hiding near, or gone to the settlement below."

"They were all dressed to flee when I first came," Wingedfoot said, "and still had on their wraps when the fight began."

"Well, I'll investigate the matter," said Roman Jack, and he left the cabin and began carefully reconnoitering the surrounding woods and out-building.

The storm had almost ceased and there was a fair prospect of a clear sky and a bright moon ere long.

Finding neither maidens nor red-skins about, Jack went back to the cabin and examined the ground under the bedroom window. In the snow he found the maidens' tracks, and set out to follow them, but had gone but a few rods when they were wholly obliterated by the tracks of the retreating foe. There was undisputable evidence of a struggle in the snow where the tracks met, and this satisfied the young scout that the girls had been caught and carried off by the foe, whose tracks led down in the direction of the river.

Returning to the cabin Jack made known his discovery.

Father Lille was almost prostrated by the news, and it was then that the kind and gentle side of Old Polar's nature shone out in all its greatness through his words of sympathy and encouragement addressed to the old missionary.

"And we will start at once," he said in conclusion, "in pursuit of the foe, and never cease until the girls are recovered or we are slain in our efforts to save them."

"May God speed you, is my prayer," Lille said; "were I able I would go along with you."

"We're enough for them, father," said Wingedfoot Fred, "but before we start I want to make one request of you. I see a pair of snow-shoes hanging yonder. I would like to have them. We have two pairs of skates out here, but it may be necessary for us to leave the river and, in that case, the shoes would be of great service for the snow is quite deep."

"Take them, my son," commanded the priest, "and if you wish them, there is another pair in the woodshed."

The snow-shoes were at once procured; Roman Jack and Fred brought in their rifles—Polar Sol having left his at Convict Cave—and examined their priming, their revolvers were all carefully reloaded, and then bidding the priest and Aaron Doane good-by, they took their departure.

By this time it had ceased storming entirely and the sky was almost clear. The moon was out most of the time and its beams falling upon the snow made it light almost as day. But what-

ever was to be done under cover of night must be done speedily, for it was already growing light in the east.

Striking the enemies' trail the three hunters followed it down to the river where they found, as they had predicted, the foe had gone back up the river toward Buzzard Bend.

A light skiff of snow covered the entire surface of the ice. This made walking on the ice all the more easy and the pursuers hurried along at a rapid gait; and they had not gone over five miles before they caught sight of the retreating foe less than half a mile ahead.

"Boys," said Old Polar, as soon as they had sighted the enemy, "we mustn't let the varlets know we're follerin' 'em, or else they'll be apt to ambush us."

"How would it do for two of us to put on these snow-shoes and take to the woods and get in ahead of the villains, and, from concealment along the shore, ascertain the number of the foe and calculate the probable chances in rescuin' the maidens in an open attack. We're nearing Big Bend now, and by cuttin' across lots we can gain four miles on them if they keep to the river."

"Boy, that's the very caper," acquiesced Old Polar; "but as I'm no good on skates, I want to be one o' the cross-lot cutters, and I'd suggest Roman Jack goes with me, leavin' you, seein' you're an artist on skates."

"All right; just as you say, Sol," was Wingedfoot's reply.

Hastily the old hunter and Jack adjusted the snow-shoes, and taking leave of Wingedfoot, struck into the woods where the snow, on an average, was two feet deep, and where traveling would have been almost impossible without snow-shoes.

Putting on the skates he had taken from Wolf Tooth, Wingedfoot, in pursuit, cautiously swung along up the river, his eyes and ears on the alert, and his faithful hound following at his heels. There was an inch or two of snow upon the ice, but it being light and dry, and the ice smooth and hard as glass, it offered but little resistance to the skates.

When morning dawned, the outlaws were fully fifteen miles from Buzzard Bend, some of them plodding along with wearied footsteps, for they had been on a forced march for almost twelve hours.

Besides Jean Dladocq and Harold Walsingham, there were in the party one white man and no less than fifteen savages. Where so many had come from seemed a mystery to Wingedfoot Fred, for he was sure fifteen savages had never escaped alive from Father Lille's cabin.

The captive girls were seated in a close and cramped position in the dog-sledge that Naida had abandoned the night before near Father Lille's cabin. This was drawn by two fleet-footed warriors.

Shortly after daylight, the enemy discovered Wingedfoot Fred and his dog following them. This discovery was greeted with a derisive laugh from the outlaws, and a yell of defiance from the red-skins. But none of them dare attempt to give chase to the boy, for they knew they had as well pursue a fox as the Young Mercury of the Forest.

There were but two rifles in the party, and owing to the extreme sharp, cutting air, they were slung at the back of their owners, that the movement of the hands and arms might be free; and as long as these weapons were not called into requisition, Wingedfoot Fred seemed to have no fears in crowding close upon them.

The two warriors drawing the sledge kept about twenty rods in advance of the main party which expected danger, if any danger at all should menace them, from behind and kept back to cover their flight with the girls.

Walsingham and Dladocq became highly amused when they discovered that Wingedfoot alone was following them, and cracked many jokes at the expense of their pursuer and his dog.

"I presume," Dladocq observed, attempting to be facetious, "that dog and his chum are coursing us to our lair."

"I don't know what he intends to do," replied Walsingham, in a more matter-of-fact tone, "but I do know he and his two friends piled up Indians in that cabin like cord-wood. But I would give a dollar to know what that boy expects to accomplish following us alone, more than to see where we go."

"I rather think the reason he is alone," replied Dladocq, "is because there was no one in good health to come with him. I feel certain our folks wounded, if they did not kill, some of that outfit last night, and—"

His words were here cut short by a dull, stun-

ning report by a couple of rifles mingled with a savage cry of agony.

Glancing in the direction whence the cry came they saw the two savages drawing the sledge stagger, part and fall upon the ice, and turning their eyes to the point from whence rifle-shots had come, they saw Old Polar Sol and Roman Jack standing upon the bank of the river opposite them with smoking rifles in their left hands and a revolver in their right; and this startling discovery had no sooner been made than the hunters greeted them with a fusillade of revolver-shots.

The bullets whistled around them and even pelted them, but the distance was so great and their clothing so thick that the balls failed to inflict injury, unless happening to strike an unprotected spot, which was the case in two instances—one wherein a savage was struck in the throat and killed instantly, and the other in which a ball striking Jean Dladocq on the side of the head, passed barely through his cap and knocked him down slightly stunned.

Uttering a demoniac war-whoop, every living savage dashed away toward the two daring hunters, who, with a mocking peal of laughter, took to their heels. Scrambling up the bank like a pack of hounds, the red-skins were completely dismayed to see the bordermen skimming away over the snow like deer, while they floundered hip-deep in the cold drift.

Walsingham, supposing his friend Dladocq had been killed or wounded, dropped on his knee by his side, and while bending over him he was suddenly startled by something gliding past him like a swift bird. He raised his eyes. An oath burst from his lips. He saw Wingedfoot Fred, the Young Mercury of the Forest, gliding like a meteor down the river—having passed within twenty feet of him.

Straight toward the sledge, in which still sat Ruth and Naida half dead with despair and cold, glided the adventuresome boy. When within a few rods of the sledge he slackened his speed slightly, squatted upon his haunches and was thus carried forward by momentum. As he passed the sledge he threw out his hand and brushed his fingers along the side, setting the vehicle in motion, and as he glided on he seized the rope attached to the forward end of the sledge, rose to his feet and sped on, dragging the conveyance after him.

Ruth Lille starting to her feet like one suddenly awakened from a frightened dream, lost her balance and fell from the sledge. Naida uttered a cry of terror, and would, doubtless, have followed her, had Wingedfoot not looked back. The sight of his face calmed her fears, and she settled back in her seat.

Before Wingedfoot Fred had discovered his loss of Ruth he was more than four rods away, and the savages turning back from pursuit of Polar Sol and Roman Jack were coming up the river, yelling like demons, while Walsingham and Dladocq, having already reached the maiden, had opened a fire with revolvers on the boy without the least regard as to whom they hit—boy or girl, or both.

Bitterly disappointed in Ruth's mishap, the youth sped on, determined to save Naida if possible. A hot race now ensued. His flight obstructed by the weight of the sledge and the free movement of both of his hands, Wingedfoot had the hardest race of his eventful young life. With every nerve strung to its utmost tension, with every energy of mind and body called into action, he fairly flew up the river, at every stride white wings seeming to rise and fall about his feet as his skates cleaved the powdered snow that shrouded the icy bosom of the river.

CHAPTER XII.

A MESSENGER FROM BUZZARD BEND.

THE fury of Walsingham and Dladocq knew no bounds when they found that after all their precaution and jesting, the "dog and his chum" had outwitted them and deliberately taken one of the girls from their very grasp and escaped with her.

The two villains did not join in the pursuit of the boy, preferring to remain behind and keep charge of Ruth.

But five of the fleetest savages continued the chase after the first mile dash. They were strong and desperate warriors, of great endurance, and for the first two miles they gained gradually upon the boy, but after that the distance began to widen between them.

One mile after mile slipped behind him and as yet not a word had passed between him and Naida.

With measured strides and unfailing strength the youth sped on, taxing Bugle to his utmost to keep pace with him. And not until many miles had been traveled, Buzzard Bend passed in safety,

and the mouth of the Manomine was in sight, did he stop. When he did, he turned, his face flushed and streaming with perspiration, and his eyes glowing with a light of joyous triumph, and with a smile upon his lips, said:

"Well, there, how's that for a sleigh-ride, Miss Naida?"

"Oh, Wingedfoot! you dear, brave boy!" cried the maiden, rising to her feet and stepping from the sledge, her face radiant with joy, "you have saved my life! Oh! how can I ever repay you for this?"

"Your kind words, Miss Naida—your grateful appreciation fully repay me," responded the youth, who, though an uncultured and unpolished backwoodsman, was possessed of that manly honor, courage and gallantry as ever wins the respect and admiration of a true woman; "all I've done I considered my duty to do, and my only regret now is that I did not rescue that other girl from them wretches."

"Poor Ruth! she was crazed with fear. She did not know what she was doing when she jumped from the sledge."

"Well," Fred observed, "my work will not be done until you are both safe at Deer Lodge, and, as every moment is precious, if you will take your seat in the sledge we will hasten on to the Convict Cave and there await the coming of Polar Sol and Roman Jack, as we had arranged."

"Wingedfoot, I should prefer to walk with you if you have no objections," the maiden said, a little timidly.

"None at all, I'm sure, for you must be tired of riding so far," Fred replied, apparently pleased with her preference, and gallantly offering her the support of his arm, which was accepted, the two moved on.

The maiden tripped along lightly, a decided look of happiness upon her young face.

After a few minutes' walk they turned into the mouth of the frozen Manomine and moved toward the cave. As they approached it Fred began to speculate in his mind as to how they might find the Indian they had left there the night before bound and gagged; and it occurred to him that he might be taking some risks by entering the place without having first investigated the situation there. But before he had fully decided what course he should pursue, he was happily relieved by the sight of Old Polar Sol and Roman Jack coming down the river, each carrying a quarter of deer which they had succeeded in killing in crossing through the woods.

Stopping about fifty paces from the cave Wingedfoot waited until his friends came up when a few moments of congratulations and rejoicings were indulged in. While thus engaged Wingedfoot suddenly caught sight of a hairy face peering from the narrow passage in the snow-bank leading into the dug-out—the face of a white man.

Mechanically the young hunter's hand dropped to his belt, but at the same moment the face disappeared.

"Boys!" the lad exclaimed, "there's some one in that cave!"

"That Ingin ought to be there," said Old Polar.

"Yes, but there's a white man there," declared Fred, and even as he spoke a man in a hunter's garb came bounding from the cave with the whoop of a wild Indian.

"Bless Moses! it is Columbia Jim, one of my chums!" cried Fred, beside himself with joy, while Bugle gave a loud bark and began capering about as if imbued with his master's spirit; "yes, and if there don't come Old Dismal and Pilgrim Dave, too! whoop! hail to you, pards of Deer Lodge!"

Columbia Jim and Polar Sol being friends of old, advanced to meet each other. Clapping hands with a clap like that of two boards coming violently together, they stood gazing into each other's eyes laughing like school-boys.

"God bless your old owl's soul," Lumbia Jim! exclaimed Old Polar, "it does me away, 'way up to wobble your paw ag'in! It's been sixty-seven years since I looked upon that tortuous ugly face, and it does 'pear to mine eyes that time's been excavatin' a little 'round your chops and layin' the white-wash on yer hair and beard. But how are you. 'Lumbia? how've you been? where've you been since—"

"Say, Polar Solomon," interposed Columbia Jim, "be you 'bout through? Am I to have a chance to inquire 'bout your health?—to tell you old age improves your looks and strengthens your 'rangement for rotary talkin'? God bless you, Polar, I'm frolicsome to see you, so rise up, man, and let me introduct you to my friends, Old Dismal and Pilgrim Dave—regular ole Jin-ewary thaws, both o' 'em."

These last-named coming up, a general introduction was given all around, and it was amusing to Old Polar Sol to observe how awkward and confused Columbia Jim and Old Dismal were in their remarks to the fair Naida.

Finally Wingedfoot Fred, who had the maiden's comfort as well as safety at heart, inquired:

"How's everything in the cave, friends?"

"All right, though there's a red-skin in there, bound hand and foot," replied Old Dismal. "We left him as we found him, waitin' his owner."

"He b'longs to Polar Sol; but, friends, what brought you up here?"

"We come up here to look after you," Dismal answered. "The elk returned with the sledge, in which set the trader, Wyncoop, shot through the head, and we war afraid you'd gone under, too, or war in trouble. Boy, d'ye know who shot the trader?"

"I was compelled to," replied Wingedfoot, as all moved on toward the cave. "He was nothin' but an old spy, sent up to our place to find out all he could. But when I get to the cave I'll tell you all 'bout it. And for you, Pilgrim Dave, I've some good tidin's, or else I'm woefully mistaken."

"For me, Fred?" exclaimed the hunter.

"For you," reiterated the young hunter, as he entered the cave.

All followed into the dug-out except Old Dismal, who remained outside on guard.

An hour later, as the party was seated around their fire, Wingedfoot narrated all his adventures from the time of leaving Deer Lodge up to the moment of their meeting on the ice. And after he had finished, Pilgrim Dave asked:

"Then you are sure that the missionary's daughter, Ruth, as you called her, is his adopted daughter?"

"Naida there can tell you more than I can about her," replied Fred.

"She is the adopted daughter of the missionary, sir," Naida answered with maidenly modesty. "She is a sweet and lovely girl grown to womanhood. Many years ago she was left at Father Lille's door one very dark, cold night—"

"And she has blue eyes, fair complexion, and light brown hair!" broke in the excited, impatient Pilgrim Dave.

"Then you have seen her, for that is her description," the maiden answered.

"She must be—must be, my child!" cried Pilgrim Dave, his face and tone betraying deep emotion. "My child, Miss Naida, was stolen from me fourteen years ago, but by whom I know not. I say stolen: she disappeared at that time and, although I had given her up as dead, hopes of her being alive were recently revived in my breast by a story of adventure told by my friend Dismal. And so the girl is in the power of the savages?"

"Not so much in the red-skins' power," Naida replied, "as the power of one of the very men who aided, or abetted, in stealing her from her home when she was a little child, too young to remember anything about her abduction. That man has been at Buzzard Bend quite a week. He was a friend of Canada Carl, who had been at the Bend some time—the man whom Wingedfoot killed. The other man's name was Harold Walsingham—"

"Harold Walsingham! Great God, that demon!" cried Pilgrim Dave; friends, that settles it. That girl is my child! Oh, that I had known this sooner! But I never expect to see her now. Harold Walsingham will murder her because he holds a devil's spite against me!"

"Don't despair, Pilgrim Dave," said Roman Jack, "for as long as we've life we'll pursue Walsingham and his gang to the end o' the world. Ruth shall be rescued tho' all the devils between heaven and hell oppose us!"

"Bravo!" shouted Columbia Jim.

"Amen!" added Old Polar Sol. "The Cold Wave o' the Nor'west has a life to give in the cause, and with Roman Jack, a whole legion in a fight; Wingedfoot Fred, the pistol-artist after the Old Masters, Signior Dan-yeli Boone and Monsieur Kit Carson; Mr. Dismal, and the valourous Hail Columbia James, will make a Roman Holiday for that man Walsingham and his rusty-rinded varlets. The maid, Ruth, was brought on to Buzzard Bend, and if she is spirited away from there, as she likely will be, it will not be before nightfall and very prob'ly not before this cold weather moderate. With the jeewhometer at least ten degrees below Pedro, the Cold Wave loose along the Red River, and Young Mercury ready with feathers plumed to soar aloft and paint destruction over the sky, along with the other cyclones, them outlaws are goin' to take no risks. But we should be on our guard all the same. We want to watch every

corner and every move. As soon as night sets in we should reconnoiter the Bend and, really, station a guard up there to see that the gal is not stolen away under kiver of night. Now, I for one volunteer to go up and reconnoiter Buzzard Bend, seein' I'm some'at 'quainted with the place and its s'roundin's."

"And I and Bugle will go for another," put in Wingedfoot Fred.

"And I for a third," said Roman Jack.

"Two's enough," Polar said, "seein' we'll have the dog. You'll have a chance, Roman, to do some work before the end is reached."

Thus was the programme for the coming night arranged. The party feasted upon broiled venison, and passed the remainder of the day discussing topics incident to their situation and surroundings.

As soon as it was dark, Old Polar and Wingedfoot Fred and his dog took their departure to reconnoiter Buzzard Bend.

Roman Jack was the first to go on guard at the dug-out. The night was dark, for the sky was clouded over, and a stiff north wind was roaring through the pines. But despite the darkness, objects could be seen on the white snow on the frozen river at quite a distance, and Jack had been on duty less than an hour when he discovered a dark something coming up the Manomine toward him.

Watching it closely, it soon came near enough for him to see it was a man. He appeared to be quite lame, and Jack's first thought was that it was Polar Sol or Fred, who had been hurt, and was returning. However, to make sure, he called out:

"Who comes there?"

"It's me—Lame Duke, from Buzzard Bend, and, if you feel like it, bang away and shoot the stuffin' out o' my miserable life," was the surprising response given in a weary, disheartened tone.

"Come up closer, and I'll see if your're worth the powder and lead," Roman Jack commanded.

The fellow limped up to the guard, but was at once turned over to Pilgrim Dave, who, coming out of the dug-out at this moment, conducted him back into the cavern.

"Well, now, what've ye caught?" exclaimed Columbia Jim at sight of the man; "what is it, Pilgrim?"

"Oh! it's Lame Duke!" cried Naida, with a start.

The stranger was a man of fifty years of age, with a shrewd, cunning face, a short, stiff beard, small, steel gray eyes. He was lame in his left leg, which, being slightly bent, was stiff at the knee, and thereby a few inches shorter than the other.

"Good-evening," the old fellow said, with the careless indifference of an old acquaintance dropping in for a friendly chat, "you're all quite cosy in here, ain't ye?—well, bless my soul! there's Miss Naida, safe and well, sure enough. You little scamp, how you've been actin'; but then I don't blame you a bit—I rejoice in your grit. Dod-darn Jean Dladocq! he's a scamp. Your old dad's feelin' awful bad 'bout the way thing's are goin'—by crazy! there's one o' old Moose's Ingins, too! In a kind o' a bad fix, bein't you, red-skin?"

"Well, say, Lame Duke, what brings you down here?" asked Columbia Jim; "give an account of yourself."

"I came down to visit you and let you know that I'm no outlaw and cut-throat," the cripple answered in a lugubrious tone.

"Put yourself to some trouble, hav'n't ye? but then how'd ye know we war here? Explain, will ye?"

"A scout was sent out to-day to look for the three cyclones that tore up things so elephantish last night at the missionary's cabin, and when he returned he reported eight or ten destroyers in camp here. That threw the whole Injun and outlaw gang into spasms and they made up their minds that the safest thing for them to do was to lean out. To this Jean Dladocq kicked like a wild bay steer, for he wanted to secure Naida, his affianced; but the others determined to go anyhow, and not wantin' to lose his hair, he concluded to let Naida go to grass and went with them."

"And so they have really gone?"

"Yes, sir, gone and taken the gal Ruth with them," answered Lame Duke; "they left shortly after dark."

"My God!" cried Pilgrim Dave, "then my child, if she Ruth was, is lost again to me, and forever!"

CHAPTER XIII.

COLUMBIA JIM AT HIS WITS' END.

LAME DUKE seated himself by the fire and stretched out his bony hands to warm them,

nervously working his fingers as he listened to Pilgrim Dave and Columbia Jim discuss the news he had brought. Hearing the name of Wingedfoot Fred mentioned, the old man asked:

"Which o' you fellers' s' Wingedfoot Fred? I've hearn so much 'bout that lightnin'-heeled youth to-day that I'm dyin' to see the terror o' the Red River."

"He'll be round by and by," answered Old Dismal. "But, say, why didn't you go along with your Injun and outlaw friends?"

"Just becase they swore they wouldn't be incumbered with a cripple, for they war goin' to go on the fly. But then I didn't want to—me and Naida's father made up our minds to stay and take our chances. He's hopes of meetin' his darter, whom he loveth as he chasteneth. So only me and father Arnaud lord it now at Buzzard Bend. Blessings on my soul! how old Moose Head's Injun gang were chewed up last night and to-day by Wingedfoot's folks. Old Moose really believes that boy's enchanted—can't be killed—got real wings on his heels, and all such fool slosh. Fact is, Buzzard Bend's been inflicted with more fools and villains than any spot on earth in the same length o' time. But I'm sure, Miss Naida will bear me witness that, I, Lame Duke, have taken no part in iniquity, neither has her dad. Now, you can believe me or not—you can slaughter me or not, as you wish. But I do think, gents, that Naida and her father should be got together. It can be done safely, for the poor old man's rid o' Jean Dladocq's power."

"If Naida desires it," said Dismal, "we will conduct her to her father, or bring him down here."

"I'm sure I should like to be with my father," said Naida, "for I know that it was really against his wish that I was to be married to Dladocq; but the villain had a strange power over him and he was compelled to give his consent."

"S'pose then you move up to the Bend?" suggested Lame Duke, "plenty good shelter there—nearly everything left—bunks, food and all you could wish to make you comfortable; but I wouldn't recommend Naida and her dad to stay there for fear Dladocq might return."

"What say you, Miss Naida?" questioned Columbia Jim of the maiden.

"I should like to return there some time, for all my personal effects are there, unless the Indians carried them off," Naida answered.

"They didn't carry off a thing," said Lame Duke.

"All right, then," said Columbia Jim; "just as soon as Wingedfoot and Old Polar Sol get back from—from Deer Lodge where they went after a conveyance to carry Naida there, we'll come up to Buzzard Bend. It may be late—maybe mornin' before we git there."

"Then I'll hop back and tell Dad Arnaud, and we'll put things in shape," the cripple said; "the old man wasn't able to walk or he'd been with me; he's almost prostrated with this work."

"Tell the old gentleman to cheer up, for Naida's in good company and quite comfortable," said Pilgrim Dave.

"All hunky, so here we go," and rising, the old cripple limped from the cave, Pilgrim Dave escorting him apast the guard.

"He's an odd old stick," observed Dismal, when the cripple was out of hearing.

"He's a miserable, mean-lookin' old scamp's all I can say o' him," added Columbia Jim. "I didn't like that woeful whine in his voice."

"Good friends," said Naida, fairly indignant. "Lame Duke is one of the most deceitful and fertile-brained villains that was ever at Buzzard Bend! I caution you to take his story with many grains of allowance. If Wingedfoot and Polar Sol say Buzzard Bend has been deserted, I will think it is so, otherwise I will not."

"That proves my estimate o' that man's character *ko rect!*" declared Columbia Jim. "Even mistrusted he was lyin' to us, and as proof of that mistrust, you remember I 'fibbed' myself about Fred and Polar goin' to Deer Lodge? When the boys get back we'll know the truth; but I'm sorry now we didn't keep him here till they returned. And, by whaley! I believe I'll light out and bring the old sinner back if I can overtake him."

In two minutes the old borderman was out upon the Manomine, moving rapidly over the ice. It was entirely too dark to follow the old man's tracks, but he was satisfied that he would keep on the river back to the Bend. Hurrying along, the hunter had almost reached a point opposite to where the road led back from the river to the outlaws' cabins, when he suddenly stepped in something that splashed like water. He stopped and, stooping over, touched the ice

with his bare hand. To his utmost surprise and horror, he found it covered with fully an inch of moving, creeping water and slush!

Quickly the old hunter stepped to one side—a yard, a rod—but the water was still there. He could feel it creeping, crawling and pushing around his feet like a snake.

Never was Columbia Jim so surprised, so astounded. It had been bitter cold for weeks, so that the overflow could have come from no natural causes. Neither could it have been a sudden upheaval of water from the river. It might have been a great spring, somewhere along the river, bursting from its icy thralldom and rushing out over the ice of the river. He even thought he heard, mingled with the roar of the wind among the pines, the rush and tumble of waters. Of this—in fact, of nothing whatever, was he certain; and so perplexed and unsettled did his mind become, that he finally turned about and began retracing his steps to the dug-out, for the first time in his life at his wits' end.

CHAPTER XIV.

SOMETHING MYSTERIOUS.

THE cabins at Buzzard Bend had been erected many long years before the opening of our story it was said, by the Northwestern Fur Company, but they being abandoned shortly afterward, for some unknown reason, they had ever been the temporary quarters of nomadic hunters and the stopping-place of *voyageurs*. The buildings consisted of two long, low cabins, or rather, two rows of four cabins each joined together in one. These cabins had been surrounded by a stockade, but this of late years had been permitted to fall into decay or been used for fuel. A little stream fed by numerous springs came babbling through the forest and, passing near the south cabin, fell over a stony ledge into a narrow channel ten to fifteen feet deep and gliding on some sixty rods further, lost itself in the Red River.

To Old Polar Sol every foot of the country surrounding Buzzard Bend was familiar, and it was this knowledge of the place that enabled him and Wingedfoot to approach it by ways most favorable to them.

After crossing the Red River opposite the mouth of the Manomine, the scouts put on their snow-shoes and by a circuitous route through the woods approached the cabins that stood back from the river about three hundred yards.

The two scouts approached the cabin from the river side, though fully three hours had elapsed since leaving the dug-out up to the time they had gained a point of observation, so cautiously had their movements been made.

Within easy pistol-shot of the nearest cabin they secreted themselves behind the trunk of a large pine. But one of the cabins was lighted, and the door of one of the rooms stood open or, rather was opened every moment or two by some one passing in or out. Near the further cabin the scouts saw about a dozen Indian lodges, but even while they were watching they saw the Indians go out and tear them down and remove them into the dark or disused cabin.

"They must be goin' to pull out," whispered Wingedfoot Fred, "seein' they're tearin' up, or are just takin' their *tepees* in out of the cold."

"They're gittin' ahead o' another Roman holiday," returned Old Polar.

As they could see Indians and white men going in and out the cabin, in apparent haste, the scouts knew something was afoot, and in hopes of learning definitely what it was, Polar proposed a change in their point of observation. So dropping back they made a *detour* in the woods expecting to approach the cabins from the southeast under cover of the channel heretofore mentioned; but to their surprise and disappointment, they found the channel full of water and, of course, frozen over. Suddenly, however, Old Polar was reminded of a fact connected with that ditch and, in a low tone said:

"I remember now, this channel has a dam at the lower end next the river. It war put in by the fur company and repaired by others from time to time and called, when filled with water, 'the Reservoir.' The object of it was an ample water-supply inside the stockade in case of fire or siege. When full as it now is it must be ten or fifteen feet deep."

Having thus given a history of the Reservoir the scouts moved on. They did not change their course because they found no channel, but moved toward the cabins on the ice where they found easy walking.

When within about fifty paces of the buildings they noticed a light moving to and fro between one of the cabins and the head of the Res-

ervoir, while persons could still be seen going in and out at the door of the building.

"The varlets are still on the move busy as beavers," Old Polar observed softly. "Jonah's whale! we must know what they're up to."

The branches of the trees interlaced their boughs over the Reservoir, making it as dark as the hall of a dungeon. It was a fine place to get into a trap, but trusting to their own eyes and ears, and Bugle's keen scent, they moved cautiously forward making sure no savage's form was blended with the darkness of a tree-trunk.

Old Polar Sol was moving at Wingedfoot's left, and a pace in advance, his eyes bent downward, when he suddenly threw out his hand and grasping the youth by the arm said, in an excited whisper:

"Sufferin' Socrates! look under our feet, boy!"

Fred dropped his eyes to the ice, starting as he did so for, he saw what appeared to be a ball of fire or luminous body moving along down within the frozen depths of the Reservoir!

"Goblins! what is it, Sol?" exclaimed the boy in amazement.

"It's a light sure as there be a Heaven 'bove us!"

"But it's not a human affair," Wingedfoot declared, "for nothin' of the kind could exist down there. It must be some kind of a luminous fish or animal."

"I'll swear, I don't know what it is; it breaks me all— Ah! there it goes back! See it? I tell you it's a light down under the ice, or Satan's a saint!"

Wingedfoot made no reply. He was completely dumfounded. After a few moments' mental reflection they moved on. They were perhaps twenty-five paces from the cabin when a clear light suddenly burst on their view from the shadows before them and moved away toward the house. They could see it was the light of a lantern carried by some person, but where that person had so suddenly come from was the question. A few more steps forward, however, revealed to them the outlines of an Indian lodge or tent on the ice before them, and from this they concluded the light had come.

Even while they were discussing the matters in whispers, the lantern again appeared from the cabin, returned to and disappeared in the lodge. Still, a few minutes later a savage from the house, walked down to the tent and entered it; and, what was still more surprising, he was followed by a second, third, and so on, until no less than six or eight had passed into that lodge.

"Now what do you suppose is goin' on in there?" asked Fred.

"Ast me somethin' easy, Wingedfoot," was the response of the Cold Wave, evidently perplexed.

"Well, I'm goin' to know," declared Fred, removing his snow-shoes that he might have free use of his feet in case he should be discovered and compelled to fly for his life.

"Be awful keeful, lad," cautioned Polar, "for I tell you we're on dangerous grounds."

With the silence of a shadow the young hunter crept toward the lodge, trusting to the roaring of the winds in the tree-tops to drown what little noise his feet made in the creaking snow. He approached the tent from the side opposite the entrance, and when he had reached about to see that the coast was clear, he applied his ear to the side and listened. But not a sound could he hear. This puzzled him more than ever, and, while he stood wondering whether to remain there a while or return to Polar Sol, he caught sight of a thread of light between the overlapping edges of the skins out of which the lodge was constructed. With this discovery came the desire to see into the tent, and unable to resist the temptation, he reached out and gently parted the edges of the skins an inch or two. As he did so the light disappeared, but not before he had made a discovery that so startled him that he could scarcely suppress a cry of astonishment.

Rising he stole noiselessly back to his anxious, impatient friend, almost speechless with suppressed emotions.

"Wal, what is it? how many's in that lodge, and what are they doin'?" questioned Polar.

"Not a soul there!" answered the boy.

"Boy, yer crazy! thar wer'n't a soul went away, but another man with a light went in," declared the old borderman.

"I know that, too, friend Polar," replied Fred; "but inside of that lodge there is a big hole in the ice, and through that hole, down into the dark depths of the reservoir them Ingins and outlaws descended—for all I know, to take counsel of the devil!"

CHAPTER XV.

PREPARING FOR BLOODY BLOWS.

"SWORD o' Old Gideon!" exclaimed Polar Sol, when Wingedfoot Fred had told him of the discovery he had made, "are the outlaws and Ingins o' Buzzard Bend amphibious demons? or war it spirits o' murdered victims we've see'd marchin' to and fro in a ghostly parade? What d'ye say, boy?"

"It's neither, Sol," replied Fred; "I don't think there's any water under the ice—it's been drained off or sunk away—and the foe are down under us workin' up some deviltry. That accounts for the light we saw beneath our feet."

"Then the dam at the lower end of the Reservoir has been broken and the water drained off, leavin' the ice hanging here like a flat roof."

"That's about the size of it, Sol—but, hist! the door of the cabin opens again!"

True enough, the door was thrown open revealing a bright light within the room. A man was seen to come out and was immediately followed by seven others, all of whom walked down to the Reservoir and passed into the lodge on the ice.

"You observe that, do you, Polar?" queried Fred; "that makes no less than sixteen or eighteen we have seen enter that lodge and but one—be of the lantern—go out. Surely, there can't be many left in the house. Judas! if I could only smash this ice down onto 'em!"

"I'll be crucified if I can see what they're up to; but to make sure o' one thing, s'pose we slip down and examine the lower end of the Reservoir and see if the dam is broken."

To this Fred assented, and they at once started back toward the river. They had gone but a short distance when they discovered three figures skulking beside a tree on their left, and were making preparations for defense when their ears were greeted by the query:

"Hullo, there! that you, Wingedfoot and Polar?"

Wingedfoot recognized the voice as that of Columbia Jim.

"Yes, old pard, come forth," he commanded, and the next minute they were joined by Columbia Jim, Old Dismal and Roman Jack.

"What's wrong, boys, anything?" eagerly questioned Polar.

"Come to hunt you fellers," replied Old Jim; "war afeard you war all drowned; the hull Red River's flooded below and we came up to investigate the matter and look you up. We found the dam to this creek or pond, or whatever 'tis, broken open by accident or force and all the water discharged onto the ice o' the river, the bottom o' the creek or pond bein' still a little higher than the surface o' the river. But I s'pose you've diskivered that Buzzard Bend has been deserted, haven't ye?"

"We've discovered no such a thing, 'Lumbia Jim," replied Polar, "but we *did* see them all, or most o' them, I should say, come out o' the cabin and go down *under this ice* within the past half-hour."

"Ha!" ejaculated Old Dismal, "then Naida was right about Lame Duke whose little game begins to show up."

"Who's Lame Duke?" questioned Wingedfoot.

Columbia Jim briefly narrated the story of Lame Duke's visit to the cave, his story of the outlaws and Indians' flight, his invitation for them to go up to the cabins, his departure, Naida's suspicions, his—Jim's—pursuit of the old cripple, the finding of the ice flooded, his return to the dug-out, the starting of the three to look for their friends, leaving Pilgrim Dave and Naida alone with the captive Indian at the cave to await their return.

"A trap's been set for us," declared Old Polar, when he had heard Columbia's story, "and I wish to goodness you'd 'a' promised that crippled varlet we'd go up to the cabins."

"That's exactly what we did do," replied Columbia.

"Then why can't we have a Roman holiday? Why can't we put our five massive intellects together and devise some scheme by which we can turn the tables on them cunnin' varlets and rescue the gal, Ruth? Now, it's probable the gal, and most all the Buzzard-Benders, are concealed under this ice, and that there's no one at the cabin but Lame Duke, and maybe, Naida's father. The trick is to git us into the cabin once and then when we're off our guard the varlets will come whoopin' out o' their novel hidin'-place and butcher us. The trick's a cute one, for who'd ever think o' lookin' under the river for concealed foes? How many ways the devil takes, and long ways, too, to get the drop on a man. But after all they're not so smart. They might 'a' swore that water on the river-ice

would 'rouse s'picion unless they expected it to be frozen solid before we got around."

"Well, grant it that we've figgered out the enemy's designs and plans, what do you propose we shall do to thwart them?" inquired Roman Jack.

"Wal, let me see," answered Polar; "we see'd 'bout sixteen o' the varlets go into the tent. Say thar war four or five in thar before we began to count; that'd be twenty or more. Now, the Cold Wave has two revolvers—six shots each—good for say eight or ten o' the gang. How are you fellers fixed?"

A count of revolvers showed eight at hand; in all, forty-four shots.

"As every man here," Polar went on, "is an artist with a revolver, we can flummix them varlets easy enough, pervidin' things all work out as we plan. I know we're takin' some risks, and ag'inst big odds, but we've got to do it if we'd save that gal; and o' course we're goin' to save her or die in our tracks as becomes men. Now, I'd suggest we divide up—two go back and enter the empty Reservoir through the broken dam, and crawl as cautiously as they can to where the demons are in waitin' and there watch their chances. They'll not be 'spectin' any one under there, and as they doubtless have a light or two, them as go can judge by the lights 'bout whar the varlets are. If no light is seen, the ear will have to be the guide. Then, when these outside think they've had time to git into position, they can send one o' their number to tell Lame Duke that the folks at the Convict have decided not to move up to the cabin at all. If the cripple is there, as he or Henri Arnaud doubtless will be, and they're into the infernal trap business, as we suspect, he or they'll go and inform the varlets in the Reservoir, and they'll have to crawl out, for I don't s'pose it's a cave o' the gods under that ice. If they have Ruth with them under there, she may be brought out first; and if she is, the three outside must be ready and jump onto her custodians and release her before those back can get out, for it's probable they'll have to come one at a time. The crack o' the pistols outside will be the signal for those under the ice to sail into the rear and thus divide their attention. But if the gal is brought out last, those outside must keep quiet and the two under the ice rescue the gal, the sound o' their shooters to be the signal for those outside to waltz into the advance o' the foe. But whoever enters the cave will have to be guided by circumstances to some extent. Not knowin' whether there will be any light there to work by, they may not know when the gal's brought out—must be careful, too, not to shoot her. But if she is not there, we want to make it hot for the varlets, anyhow. So, whoever goes into the hole must use their own judgment accordin' to risin' emergencies."

"Well, I'll go, for one," said Wingedfoot, "for I can take Bugle, and what I can't see nor hear he can smell."

"And I will go for the other," added Roman Jack.

"That settles it, then," said Polar Sol, "the Old Master, the Legion, and the dog will operate in the cave, and the Cold Wave, Hail Columbia James and Old Dismal will work the upper regions."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE DISMAL CAVERN.

As Wingedfoot Fred and Roman Jack turned to depart for the lower end of the Reservoir, Old Polar said, with much feeling:

"It are either for a little while or all eternity we part, boys, so good-by."

Turning, the young hunters hastened to the broken dam, which they found opened at the bottom. The Reservoir was thoroughly drained, although the natural rivulet was still, as it had been before the dam was broken, creeping steadily along through the channel, and mingling its waters with those of the Red River by a passage under the ice.

Wingedfoot sent Bugle ahead into the ice-cave, he following close behind, and Roman Jack last. The place was dark as midnight, and pervaded with a damp, humid atmosphere. The sides of the passage sloping downward from the thick, icy roof were covered with a muddy slime, into which the boys sunk almost to their ankles. Their moccasins were soon thoroughly soaked through, and after both had slipped and fallen several times, they made up their minds to wade the rivulet. This they found rather cold footing, but little colder after all, and far less disagreeable, than the slippery, reeking slopes. The water was not more than an inch or two deep, and sped along with a tinkling ripple over a solid bed of sand and gravel.

The boys could advance but slowly. Winged-foot Fred, bent slightly forward, with his eyes and ears on the alert, kept his hand upon Bugle's back. Upon the dog's keenness of scent they relied more than on their own eyes and ears.

The unnatural cavern seemed to grow more dismal and wretched as they advanced. To the warm, damp air was added the nauseating odor of the slime and mold; but nothing daunted, the young bordermen crept steadily on and on until their patience and disagreeable feelings were at length rewarded by the glimpse of a light a long ways ahead.

Creeping on trusting to Bugle's nose for the detection of dangers amid the darkness, and to the rivulet's voice to drown the loudest possible noise they might make in their advance, they finally gained a point within fifty paces of the light and stopped to hold a whispered consultation, which ended in the decision to move on nearer the light.

With all the caution they could master they crept closer and closer, finally halting within forty feet of the nearest light, a revolver in each hand.

Three lights were now visible. Two were from old-fashioned, perforated tin lanterns, and the third was a pine torch whose wavering flame told that it was affected by a slight air-current. On a raised stage or platform of poles and slabs covered with robes and blankets, the boys discovered the captive, Ruth Lille, sitting wrapped in a blanket, her face white and pallid in the dim light of the flickering torch. Near her on the edge of the same platform sat two men whom the boys at once recognized as Jean Dladocq and Harold Walsingham. Between them and the stage they saw, sitting and standing, fifteen or twenty savages and outlaws with blankets over their heads and around their shoulders. Within fifteen feet of where they stood they saw a rude stairs that they knew landed in the lodge on the ice above.

Not a word could the boys hear uttered. Like hooded gnomes the foe sat silent and motionless while the wavering torch-light danced over the crystal roof of the cavern and the reeking, slimy walls wove a thousand grotesque figures around them.

Standing as motionless as the men they were watching, the icy water creeping around their feet, the limbs of the young hunters seemed to become paralyzed. As long as they kept moving they experienced no great effect from the cold water, but now every moment seemed an hour to them. The dread silence, broken only by the silvery tinkle of the rivulet, was also painful to them, and it seemed that they would never be able to endure the terrible strain to the end. But relief finally came. The silence was suddenly broken by a voice from overhead bawling out:

"Say, down there; the whole dimmed scheme's fell through with. The folks to the Dug-out sent Columbia Jim up here to tell me they wouldn't move up to-night and ast me and Arnaud to go down there as they're goin' to start to Deer Lodge 'arly in the mornin'."

"It's the voice of that devilish cripple, Lame Doke!" whispered Roman Jack.

Instantly that group of gnomish figures became astir with life. They rose to their feet and began to move. A murmur of sullen voices drifted to the ears of the young hunters, followed by the louder tones of Walsingham and Dladocq freighted with horrible blasphemy.

"Now look out, pard," whispered Wingedfoot, the blood now rushing in hot currents through body and limb, "the lions are stirred up, and the tug of war has come!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A DREADFUL CONFLICT.

AFTER the boys had left them, Polar Sol, Columbia Jim and Old Dismal at once moved toward the cabins. Every avenue of approach was freely thrown open by the outlaws that their victims might walk into the trap without the least suspicion being created.

The only sign of life about the place was the light in the cabin.

Columbia Jim was selected to go to the cabin as a messenger from Convict Cave. He left his friends a few rods from the buildings, and boldly approached the door and rapped sharply upon it.

The summons was answered by the redoubtable Lame Doke, who, with a gracious smile upon his face, invited the hunter in, at the same time looking out around for others.

"No, hav'n't got time," responded Columbia. "After you left us, our folks at the cave changed their minds 'bout comin' up here. They con-

cluded to stay there till mornin', and bright and 'arly rack out for Deer Lodge. They sent me up to have you come down there—you and Mr. Arnaud. Little Naida stands by her old dad, and we do, too, and want you and him to go with us. What d'ye say—go or not?"

The disappointment of the cripple over this news was plainly visible upon his face and in his actions.

"I don't hardly know what to say," he replied. "I'm 'bout blowed now with my walk down there and rustlin' 'round here to git things in shape for you folkses' comfort. But I'll promise that me and Arnaud will be down there in an hour or two, but I can't go now till I rest my game leg."

"Well, come soon as you can," said Columbia, and turning, he strode away into the woods and rejoined his friends.

"Sword o' Gideon!" whispered Old Polar to the messenger, "we heard every word you told that feller, 'and I must say, Jim, you're a most fanciful liar. I didn't s'pose any man could spoon out fiction to a poor old cripple as you did. It made me sad, but I'll forgive you, Jim, seein' you war truth-nervous."

"I'd 'a' shot the old villain if it hadn't been for spilin' our plans," retorted Columbia Jim. "The old cuss! he can hide more cunnin' and genuine deviltry under that game leg and meek voice than ever 'lurked behind the cross.' Ah! he's comin' out the cabin!"

True enough, the form of the cripple was seen to come from the house, stop and look around him as if he half mistrusted the presence of danger, then limped on down toward the Reservoir. When they saw him enter the lodge on the ice, the three hunters moved up a few paces nearer. They heard the cripple delivering Columbia Jim's message to his ambushed friends. Then they saw him come out of the tent and limp back to the cabin.

But a few moments later they heard the sound of voices in the lodge pitched in tones of anger, and then the form of a man—Harold Walsingham—was seen to come from the tent leading Ruth, and followed by Jean Dladocq. The outlaws were giving free expression to their feelings of disappointment in language loud and profane.

The three hunters waited until five or six redskins had issued from the lodge, then at a signal from Old Sol, they leaped from their covert upon the foe. Polar thrust his revolver into Harold Walsingham's face and fired, and Columbia Jim did likewise for Jean Dladocq, while Old Dismal paid his respects to the nearest savage. Without scarcely a moan the three fell dead, and before the others realized what had happened, the hunters had turned upon them.

Had a thunderbolt fallen from the wintry sky, the savages could not have been more startled. So completely were they taken by surprise, that not one of them raised his hand in defense, but sought to save his life by flight, and in less than fifteen seconds from the firing of the first shot not a living savage or outlaw was to be seen outside, and if any had escaped, the victorious trio did not know it.

In the mean time, another conflict was going on down under the icy vault of the Reservoir. After their own fight had ended, the old hunters could hear the pent-up roar of firearms and the yells and cries of savages that suggested a battle of demons down in the cavernous realms of Pluto.

The sound of the hunters' revolvers had been the signal for Wingedfoot Fred and Roman Jack to begin their attack, although less than half the savages were out of the cave. The crack of their weapons sounded like the boom of a mortar, but as one report after another became blended together the sound rolled away through the cavern like deep, sullen thunder. The savages' yells of dismay and terror were soon added to the din. Bugle, too, uttered a deep sonorous bark and flying at the throat of a savage the two were soon rolling and floundering in the mud and water in a death struggle. So rapidly did the boys discharge their revolvers that, to the excited foe, it must have seemed that they had been attacked by a large force of enemies. But aside from numbers, the unearthly, pent-up roar of the revolvers was enough in itself to fill the souls of the red-skins with terror and send them flying in every direction like panic-stricken covotes.

Like their friends above, the Indians, and the two or three outlaws among them, never offered to return a blow, and in the mad confusion of those who endeavored to escape the unerring aim of the young hunters, they only made themselves more conspicuous as they ran, leaped, crawled and rolled hither and thither, in and out

of the torch-light—splashing through water and slime and rolling and splattering in mud like a herd of panic-stricken swine. The waters of the little stream became laden with the crimson tide of life. Deeper and more appalling rolled the subterranean thunder as, Jove-like, the young hunters stood hurling bolt after bolt around them. But the last shot was finally fired, and the conflict in the cavern had ended; but while the roar of battle was still hanging within the dismal place a voice, which was recognized as that of Polar Sol, called out from above:

"How goes it, boys, down there? Want any help?"

"No, it's all over with," replied Wingedfoot, "and we've wiped out the last one of the barbarians."

"Bravo! we've did the same up here!" shouted Polar, "and the gal is rescued. A bully old Roman Holiday it has been!"

A shout of triumph burst from the boy's lips.

Wingedfoot finally called Bugle to his side. In the light of the outlaw's flaming torch, which had been left burning when the retreat began, and in whose light the boys had picked off the savages, he saw the dog was covered with a coat of mud from the end of his nose to the tip of his tail. But despite this mud the boy lifted him in his arms and ascended the stairs to the upper world, followed by Roman Jack.

Old Polar and Dismal were there to greet them, and as soon as they saw the plight the boys were in, Polar said:

"Let's git into the cabin, boys, afore your duds freeze stiff on your bodies, and you take cold."

The four at once hastened to the cabin whither Columbia Jim had preceded them with Ruth Lille.

As they entered the room aglow with the light of a roaring fire burning on a wide hearth they saw the maiden standing alone, while from the adjacent room—also brightly lit up—came the sound of Columbia Jim's voice in angry threatening tones.

Polar Sol hastened into the room to see what was up and there found Lame Doke groveling on the floor at the feet of the old hunter, begging for his life like a cringing coward.

At sight of Roman Jack and Wingedfoot Fred, Ruth Lille started back as if with horror. She did not recognize them at first, so woeeful a sight did they present. They were mud from head to foot. Their faces were splattered and streaked until they were scarcely recognizable.

"Thank the fates, Miss Lille, you are safe at last!" Roman Jack said as his eyes met those of the maiden.

"Oh, pardon me!" the girl cried recognizing his voice, "I did not know you at first. I see you have been in that horrible cavern."

"Yes, Miss Ruth," Jack responded with a smile, "we were there, and not only demolished the red-skins left there, but managed to mop out the place with our persons. Behold my friend, Wingedfoot!—ay, and his dog. It's hard tellin' which is the sorriest lookin' critter."

"Oh, well, we're happy, anyhow," exclaimed Fred, cutting a caper across the floor in boyish glee. "Spring'll soon be here and then we'll shed our old coat: eh, Bugle, my brave old dog?"

The dog yawned an answer, then shook himself vigorously sending a shower of mud across the room and profusely sprinkling the face of Old Dismal to the amusement of the boys.

Wingedfoot Fred at once became anxious to look through the long cabin. He found there were four rooms and that there was a fire burning in each one. In the garret he found a quantity of robes, blankets and clothing that had evidently been recently concealed there. The clothing was overhauled and both he and Roman Jack succeeded in fitting themselves out in a dry suit; though the one appropriated by Wingedfoot was several sizes too large for him, and provoked no little amusement when he made his appearance before his friends.

After he had searched every nook and corner of the rooms the boy went back to the second room and said, in the presence of Lame Doke:

"Gracious angels! the house is lighted and warmed up from parlor to kitchen."

"Yes, I made the fires," said the cripple, "expectin' you folks up to spend the night. I wanted you to be comfortable, and for all this my reward is curses and threats. I tell you I'm honest. It's me as well as you that's been deceived by Dladocq and his followers. I didn't know they war concealed in the ditch, I swear I didn't."

"You old liar!" blurted Columbia Jim, "you war the very man that went down to the Reser-

voir and told your friends that their scheme had failed. Now stop your lyin' 'bout your innocence. We know what you have done. Give us a truth or two. Tell us where Henri Arnaud—Naida's father—is?"

"Don't know—s'pose you killed him," replied the cowering old villain.

Procuring one of the outlaws' lanterns, Polar and Dismal went down to the Reservoir and searched for Arnaud's body, but failed to find it in the cave or out.

Meanwhile Roman Jack had seated himself by the fire in the first room and entered into conversation with Ruth.

"You have passed through a terrible ordeal, Miss Lille," he said, "but I have every reason to believe a happy surprise now awaits you. From what I learned at the missionary's cabin and elsewhere, you are Father Lille's adopted daughter only—that when you were a little child, you'd been left at his door by some one that claimed to be your own father."

"Yes, Jack," Ruth replied, "Father Lille and I always supposed my own father had left me there, but since I have been in Walsingham's power, he confessed that he had been instrumental in taking me from my father, that two men named Phillis and Doane had, by his request, abducted me and carried me to the door of Father Lille. He told me that my father's name was David Holland—that he was dead—had been killed in the war—"

"He lied like a pirate, Ruth," declared the young hunter, "for your father is alive and within three miles of here this minute."

"My father alive, Jack?" cried the maiden, a gleam of reviving hope lighting up her sad face. "Can this be possible?"

"There's no doubt of it, Ruth."

"And when shall I meet him?" she asked, eagerly, hopefully.

"Just as soon as we can get away from here we're goin' to return to the Convict Cave where we left him and Naida."

"Oh! is it possible! is it possible that I am to meet my own father?" the maiden exclaimed, her eyes swimming in tears of joy. "Tell me, Jack, is he an old man? Is he tall? or is he short? Is he a large man? or is he small? Oh, how often have I imagined how my father and mother look. I have pictured my father in my mind as a tall, handsome man, with blue eyes like mine, a full heavy beard and a kind, gentle voice."

"Your pieter is nearly correct, Miss Ruth, tho' his face is somewhat care-worn. He has been at Deer Lodge over six months and is awful well liked by his companions. Oh, you'll not be ashamed of him, I'm sure."

"No, I know I will not, Jack," Ruth replied, her spirits reviving; "and dear old Father Lille, he who has been so kind to me all these years, will rejoice with me when he hears that his prayers have been answered and my father restored to me."

While the young folks were thus conversing, Polar Sol and Columbia Jim returned from their search for Arnaud's body, and marching straight into where Lame Doke sat, Polar Sol seized him by the collar and jerking him to his feet, said in an angry tone:

"See here, you old varlet, you've told us your last lie! Now tell me where Arnaud is, or I'll hurl you into that fire as I would a serpent!"

Trembling in every limb, his teeth chattering the cripple managed to gasp out:

"Well, come to think, I believe that Dladocq did kill him for opposin' our—I mean *their* scheme to trap you."

"Ah! a slip o' the tongue!" exclaimed Old Polar. "Murder will out, and since you've admitted your guilt you'd as well unburden your old soul. Out with the whole story. Tell us why Arnaud was killed?"

"I told you," chattered the cowardly old villain, "that he opposed the scheme to trap you fellers. He thought an awful sight of little Naida, and didn't want Dladocq to get her, for he was afraid he'd 'most kill her for runnin' off. She was awful good to the old man, if he was only her step-father, but he was afraid of Dladocq—I don't know why—and just *had* to give up for Naida to marry him. But Naida run away to keep from marryin' him, and Dladocq 'cused the old man o' puttin' her up to run off. Mebbe he did—I don't know, but Dladocq was murderin' mad; shot all the sledge-dogs and threatened to slay all the hunters 'long the Red. He was naterally a mean man, and after Walsin'ham and Phillis came here he seemed to get wusser."

"Phillis was that oily hairpin that visited Deer Lodge a few days ago, weren't he?" asked Old Dismal.

"Yes, he went down to see if one o' the Deer Lodgers war really a man they'd s'posed war dead—David Holland, I think, was the man's name—and to see somethin' 'bout your stock o' peitries."

"Well, the Old Master artist, Wingedfoot Fred, done him up in fine shape. But go on with your story about Arnaud."

"Henri Arnaud wer'n't a bad man, I can swear," the cripple went on. "He run away with his wife and Naida from the St. Croix country to git rid o' Dladocq. He came and settled down here with two other men and went to huntin' and trappin'. One day his good wife died. She's buried out yonder under a pine, and her name's writ on the tree. Nearly six months after who should come along but Jean Dladocq and Phillis, and several other mean men. They settled right down and staid here. Dladocq threatened to kill the old man if he 'tempted to dodge him ag'in. Walsin'ham come here a week ago to see Phillis 'bout takin' the missionary's girl away from him. Arnaud was opposed to the raid on Father Lille's cabin, but Dladocq had old Moose Head and his warriors under his thumb and they done just as they pleased. This evenin' when Arnaud threatened to give away the scheme to catch you fellers, Dladocq shot him dead. His body was buried in the snow back of the upper cabin. I can take you to the very spot."

"Then do so, forthwith," commanded the Polar Sol.

The search was made and the body found and recognized by Polar Sol who had seen Arnaud several times.

After returning to the cabin, Old Polar, again plied the cripple with various other questions, finally concluding with the query:

"Now, durin' your sojourn here what part have you been playin' seein' you're a cripple?"

"I alers had a desire," answered the old scamp, with an attempt to smile, "to be inventin' money—that is—"

"That is, you're a counterfeiter, you old reprobate!" exclaimed Polar. "I'll swear we ought to hang you right up *now* and *here*."

"You'd better not spend too much time tryin' to talk and scare me to death," advised the old cripple, "or you might find yourselves in a trap after all, for you needn't think your enemies are all dead by a long shot."

This remark had a decided effect upon the hunters, as the wily old outlaw doubtless intended it, and Wingedfoot Fred at once left the room and taking his dog went out into the night and made a careful reconnaissance of their surroundings; but not the sign of a living foe could he find. Returning to the cabin he attempted to go back into the second room but found the door fastened on the inside; without a word he turned aside and entered into conversation with Roman Jack and Ruth.

Some twenty minutes later Polar Sol, followed by Columbia Jim and Old Dismal, came out of the room, closed the door behind him, and said:

"Wal, folks, I reckon we'd better be pullin' out for the cave."

As he spoke he gave the boys a look that required no explanation.

With a look of decided happiness upon her fair face, Ruth arose and prepared for the journey to the dug-out, and as they passed out of the cabin, Roman Jack gallantly offered her the support of his arm, which she accepted, and thus the young hunter became her escort.

Old Polar carried a lantern, and Wingedfoot Fred and his dog led the way, Columbia Jim and Dismal bringing up the rear.

Within an hour after the departure of the hunters from the cabin, a figure—that of a white man—crept from the shadows somewhere, and approaching the door of the cabin, pushed it open and entered. His face wore a wild, haggard look. He was almost dead with cold, but he stopped not to warm at the first fire. He went from room to room. As he entered the fourth or last one, he started back at sight of a form hanging from a joist overhead. It was the body of the counterfeiter and outlaw, Lame Doke. He was motionless, *dead*!

CHAPTER XVIII.

DREAMS OF LOVE.

ALONG down the ice of the Reservoir and up the river, where walking was easier for Ruth, Wingedfoot Fred led the way; and after a couple of hours' walking they turned up the Manomine, and soon the challenge of the faithful Pilgrim Dave at the Convict's Cave, greeted their ears.

"We're friends, Pilgrim," Wingedfoot Fred

answered him, "and we've depopulated Buzzard Bend the slickest you ever saw and rescued your daughter."

"God be praised!" exclaimed the man in tones of reverence, and stepping from the cave he advanced to meet the party, impatient to look upon and know his own child.

Old Polar advanced to Ruth's side as he came up and holding the lantern up so that its light fell upon the face of the maiden and also that of the bearded hunter, said:

"This is the gal, Pilgrim."

Pilgrim Dave gazed into the face of the maiden and she into his. For several moments the man's lips were sealed. It seemed as though he was unable to speak, but finally he swallowed the lump in his throat, and a gasp—a sob, burst from his lips and reaching he clasped the maiden in his arms crying out:

"My child! my little Edith—the living image of her dead mother! Oh, my daughter! you do not know me!"

"Father!" the maiden sobbed, but she could say no more. Her heart was overflowing. Not the shadow of a doubt rested in the mind of either.

There was a deep silence for several moments. Roman Jack walked away, and Polar Sol lowered his lantern to conceal a mist of tears that glistened in his eyes.

Wingedfoot Fred had hurried on to the cave where he was greeted by Naida, whose eyes had not been closed in sleep that night.

"Naida," he said to her, "I congratulate you on bein' rid of all your enemies and persecutors."

"But what of my father, Fred?" the girl questioned, her first thought being of Henri Arnaud. "I'm sorry to have to tell you, Naida, he is no more. Jean Dladocq in a fit of rage killed him."

The maiden burst into tears of grief and sobbed most bitterly. Fred endeavored to comfort her with kind and sympathetic words.

Presently the others came into the retreat. Ruth, happy now, clasped Naida in her arms, crying out:

"Oh, Naida! I have found my father at last!"

"And I have lost mine, sweet Ruth," Naida sobbed.

"Cheer up, Naida," said the gentle-hearted Ruth, "my father shall be a father to us both."

"Yes, Naida," said Pilgrim Dave, "you shall never want for a father as long as I live."

The scene was both a happy and sad one, and it was some time before all had become settled and reconciled to the situation.

The hunters now concluded that they could afford to liberate the red-skin they had held captive so long, and did so, although Polar Sol declared that if it had not been for the presence of the girls he would have taken the fellow's scalp for luck.

Relieved of all fears and mental cares Wingedfoot, Roman Jack and Polar wrapped themselves in their blankets, and laid down for a much-needed nap, having been on the go for over forty-eight hours without sleep or rest. In five minutes they were sound asleep.

Pilgrim Dave never closed an eye that night. Joy and happiness banished sleep, and for hours he and Ruth talked of the past, each recounting the events in his and her life during the years of their separation. It was with great joy that Pilgrim Dave listened to Ruth's story of Father Lille's kindness to her as a father, a teacher and Christian adviser.

When morning came the three hunters were still sound asleep. Their friends would not disturb them, and when they finally awoke it was quite noon. Rising, they greeted their friends, and going out into the open air, walked around awhile, washed their hands and faces with snow, and then returning to the cave, announced themselves ready for dinner, which the girls took great pleasure in preparing, though requiring but little time and labor, as broiled venison was the only food they had to prepare.

After all had dined they began discussing the advisability of starting at once for Deer Lodge. While thus engaged, Naida's eyes were seen to fill with tears, and rising, she walked out of the cave without saying a word to any one.

Wingedfoot Fred saw that she was in trouble, and followed her out. He found her standing a few rods away, her tearful eyes fixed thoughtfully on something far off.

"Naida," said the youth, approaching, "I see you are sad."

"Yes, indeed, Fred," she replied, with quivering lips; "I have enough to bear to make me sad."

"That's true, Naida; but you have passed the

ordeal in safety, and the future lies before you with nothing to fear and much to live for."

"You do not—you cannot understand me, Fred. I am now entirely alone in the world."

"Not by any means, Naida," declared the youth. "Every blessed one of us is your friend."

"I do not doubt that; you have been brave, kind friends, to whom I owe my lasting blessing. But still you are strangers, in one sense of the word. If I were a boy like you, I could make my way through the world easy enough. I may have relatives somewhere in the world, but they, too, are strangers to me. I am but the unsophisticated daughter of a hunter, and the last year of my life has been spent in the rendezvous of a band of outlaws and evil men. All this would be against me, as I am a girl, but if I were a boy it would not."

"Naida," said Fred, with no little depth of feeling, "it's true I have known you but a few days, and yet I, as well as my friends—yes, even the outlaw, Lame Doe himself—know you to be a pure and innocent girl with all the nobler instincts of exalted womanhood."

"Oh, Fred!" the girl exclaimed, "it is truly comforting to know that you and your friends regard me as I am—as I have been reared in humble life by a Christian mother! But for all this, I am a helpless girl now, and do not want to become a burden to any one."

"Naida," Fred said tenderly, yet in a tone that betrayed great emotion, "you're just the kind of a burden I'd like to have upon my heart and hands all my life. I, too, am alone in the world, and while I have many good friends, I want some one to whom I can go with a claim stronger than friendship; and you, Naida, are that person. Dare I hope ever to be the same to you?"

As these words fell from the young hunter's lips, the maiden raised her eyes and gazed at him through a mist of tears like one suddenly awakening from a pleasant dream to find it reality. Her lips quivered with emotion, but uttered no word. She mechanically raised her hand to brush a tear from her cheek, and as it descended it fell into the outstretched palm of the young hunter, and there lay fluttering like a timid bird. Almost unconsciously Fred drew her close to him, and stooping kissed her brow. She blushed, her quivering lips moved, and in a tremulous voice she said:

"Fred, you shall be my friend for—"

"For life?" finished Fred.

"Yes," she answered softly, her young heart overflowing with the rapturous bliss of a new-born happiness.

"Say, out thar!" suddenly bawled out the voice of Polar Sol; "if you youngsters are goin' with us to Deer Lodge you'd better be skir-mishin' around."

Happy as two hearts could well be the young lovers returned to the dug-out, and a few minutes later the whole party filed out of the cave and moved away down the Manomine and up the Red River.

CHAPTER XIX.

BACK AT DEER LODGE.

ONCE more we find ourselves at Deer Lodge, whose occupants are now increased by four—Old Polar Sol, Roman Jack and the two girls, Ruth and Naida. They are comfortably domiciled from the inclemency of the weather and the dangers of the woods after a long yet pleasant journey from Convict Cave.

It has been three days since their arrival. Already David Holland—Pilgrim Dave—has decided upon his future course—to quit the woods and with his daughter, for his daughter's sake, go back to civilization. Naida is to make her home with them until some time in the future she can have a home of her own. Wingedfoot Fred and Roman Jack are to accompany them to the settlements. They are not certain, however, when they will start, for they will not leave until Father Lille has been seen. They are expecting the missionary there every day, for Old Dismal had been dispatched with the elk-sledge to bring him to Deer Lodge, and if he cannot come they will visit him at his cabin as soon as the weather will permit.

To their joy, however, Dismal finally returned, bringing not only the good missionary, but Aaron Doane, the invalid, also.

Ruth was so rejoiced to meet her kind old father that she was beside herself with joy, nor was the happiness of the old man any the less profound.

The whole of the events of the past week, and we may say the past fourteen years, had to be gone over for the gratification of Father Lillie.

David Holland recognized Aaron Doane, al-

though the latter was but a shadow of his former self. The invalid's story of his part in the abduction of Ruth, revealed the important part that Old Dismal played in bringing about the happy termination of one portion of our story.

The reader will, doubtless, remember the story Dismal told of finding a child in the woods, one stormy night, fourteen years before, of how he carried it to camp and cared for it, and of its mysterious disappearance an hour or two later while he was out in the woods searching for fuel.

Doane admitted that he and Phillis—alias William Wyncoop, alias Canada Carl—in fleeing with the child had become bewildered in the storm, and finally believing the child was dying of cold they dropped her into the snow, thereby relieving themselves and their nearly exhausted horses of so much burden. They had not gone far, however, when they discovered the light of a camp-fire and rode toward it. They saw nobody about it, but remained under cover and watched. Presently they beheld a man, staggering from the darkness into the light, carrying in his arms the child they had deserted. Not wishing to be seen in that country, and yet anxious to know the condition of the little one, they remained in concealment and watched the hunter warm the waif to life, then exert himself to amuse it until it finally fell asleep. When the hunter left camp to gather fuel Doane held the horses, and Phillis crept into camp and stole the child away again. They then rode on and on. The next day they stopped for awhile at Convict Cave, and the following night they left the child at Father Lille's door. So, had it not been that Old Dismal was providentially belated that night, Ruth would have perished in the storm without a doubt.

For Ruth's benefit, Old Dismal was induced to tell over again his experience of that night, and, although his efforts to amuse her by standing on his head and other boyish antics, failed of the desired result then, his story provoked the maiden and all her friends into peals of hearty laughter.

After Aaron Doane had told the story of his crime, he said:

"It may seem strange to you all that any man could be guilty of such a crime without a greater motive than I had. But I find there is no criminal depravity to which man will not descend when his moral nature has become debased by dissipation and evil influences. This crime against Holland—a man who had never harmed me by word or act—was done to gratify the revenge of another man. But, I am thankful it is the worst one of my life, and that the demon Remorse, inspired by the near approach of death, has driven me, even at this late hour, to make reparation, such as it is. And knowing that any punishment the law of the States, or of the woods, might inflict upon me will be soon ended, I leave my fate in David Holland's hands."

"And I," said Holland, "forgive you, and remand you to the mercy of your God, who will fairly and impartially mete out to you the punishment or mercy that would in the end be yours."

And here we will say that the invalid never left Deer Lodge. When Father Lille took leave of his friends and returned to his post of duty, Doane was unable to travel, although he greatly desired to return with the missionary and receive, in his dying hours, the old man's benediction. A month later he died and was buried alongside his unrepentant friend, Phillis, under the dark pines.

Wingedfoot Fred and Roman Jack never returned to the wildwoods after leaving Deer Lodge that winter. They had been persuaded to lay aside their buckskin and rifles for the garbs of civilization and school-books. Out of his bountiful inheritance, David Holland could well afford to be generous to the brave and gallant boys; but he little dreamed that, in years to come, they would make demands upon him for the hands of his daughters. But, such was the case, and Fred has ever been true to the pledge made on the ice of the Manomine, in that he made her one of the best, truest and most devoted of husbands, while Roman Jack and Ruth are equally as happy.

Polar Sol returned to his own hunting-grounds down the Red River, and Columbia Jim and Old Dismal continued in business at Deer Lodge. But the trio of grand old wood heroes were more than once brought together afterward, by events quite as stirring and adventuresome as those we have just recorded, and we may find it expedient, at some time in the future, to give our readers another chapter of the life of "Polar Sol, the Cold Wave from the Nor'west."

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